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J. D. HOLMES OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS:

A BIOGRAPHY

By

Pamela Patrick Langley

B.A., University of Montana, 1969

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

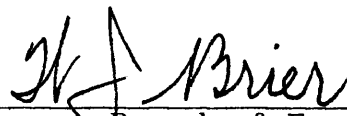
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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1980

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Langley, Pamela Patrick, M.A., Autumn 1980

Journalism

J. D. Holmes of the Associated Press: A Biography (155 pp.)

Director: Warren J. Brier *WJB*

At his retirement in 1978, Associated Press newsman J. D. Holmes had covered state government and politics for a third of Montana's history as a state. This study records his background, weekly and daily newspaper experience, AP experiences, reporting techniques, philosophy, and opinions about state government.

The research sources include interviews, weekly and daily newspapers, letters, memos, magazine articles, and Holmes' files, notebooks, scrapbooks, and "Black Book." The period from 1915 to 1980 is covered.

As an AP newsman, Holmes was meticulously organized and highly competitive, cultivated sources to obtain stories, and was described as a vacuum cleaner of a reporter. While he attempted to make the truth interesting, his news stories were objective, containing a minimum of color but sufficient background. His specialty was government finance. Holmes did little investigative reporting because an AP Capitol writer has little time for it and because he did not like analysis. He covered sixteen regular and six special sessions of the Montana Legislature.

Holmes was the AP's Capitol reporter either full time or part time for the thirty years he worked for the news service. In addition, he covered or helped to cover every major event in the state from 1948 to 1978, including the death of Governor Donald Nutter in 1962, the Madison Canyon Earthquake in 1959, the Mann Gulch Fire that killed thirteen smokejumpers, the cannibal slaying of James Schlosser in 1970, and a Western Airlines crash that killed twenty-two persons on Election Day in 1950.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my parents Clarence and Ruth Patrick for giving me the initiative, tenacity, and desire to complete this thesis; to my husband Gary for his perseverance, advice, and editing; to our children Jefferson Patrick and Kari Jane for their patience; to J. D. for many hours of exercising his "rememberer"; and to my committee members Dean Warren J. Brier, Jerry Holloron, and Dr. Robert Jay for their careful consideration of this manuscript, thank you.





J. D. HOLMES

## INTRODUCTION

A Montana, Magazine of the Northern Rockies article described Joseph Defrees Holmes as a "Montana institution" soon after his retirement in October 1978.

Former state Rep. Paul Harlow, a Thompson Falls Democrat, was a member of the first Legislature Holmes covered in 1949. After that session Harlow didn't serve again until 1967. When Harlow walked into the House chambers after his 18-year absence he went up to Holmes and told him, "You're the only familiar thing I could find. You're right where I left you 18 years ago."

. . . . Only state Sen. Dave Manning, a Hysham Democrat, has been around the Montana Legislature longer and Manning is recognized as the nation's longest served [sic] legislator with service going back to 1933. . . .

Holmes had a distinguished career not likely to be equaled if for nothing else, its longevity. Reporters have a habit of burning out quickly, and young.<sup>1</sup>

The longevity of Holmes' career with the Associated Press is best placed in perspective when measured with the age of other institutions. At his retirement, he could relate from personal experience the workings of the Montana Associated Press for more than half the time it had disseminated state news<sup>2</sup> and, perhaps more importantly, he

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Kotynski, "J. D. Holmes Reviews 30 Years of Legislators, Governors, Judges and Budgets," Montana Magazine of the Northern Rockies, January-February 1979, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>The first AP correspondent was assigned to Montana in 1921.

had reported Montana politics and events for more than a third of the state's history.<sup>3</sup>

Holmes worked under nine correspondents and chiefs of bureau in Helena: John Kamps, 1948-51; Merrill W. Englund, 1951-53; Thomas W. Maddox, 1953-62; William Tobin, 1962-63; David C. Beeder, 1963-66; Wick Temple, 1966-68; Ben Brown, 1968-70; Paul Freeman, 1970-75, and Hugh van Swearingen, 1975-78.<sup>4</sup>

He covered sixteen regular and six special sessions of the Montana Legislature. In addition, he covered seven governors, eight lieutenant governors, five attorneys general, three secretaries of state, two auditors, five superintendents of public instruction, four chief justices, ten treasurers,<sup>5</sup> six United States senators, six eastern district

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<sup>3</sup>Montana became a state in 1889.

<sup>4</sup>Wick Temple, "The Associated Press in Montana: Land of Big Sky and Big Snow," AP World, Autumn 1966, p. 27. Maddox became chief of bureau in 1960 and his successors have had that title. In 1980, eight of the correspondents or bureau chiefs are living and one has died: Merrill Englund who died November 2, 1976, after working as an administrative assistant to Sen. Lee Metcalf from 1953 to 1966. Kamps is retired from the AP and living in Naples, Florida; Maddox left the AP in 1962 and is a retired association executive living in Helena; Tobin is Anchorage, Alaska, Daily Times general manager; Beeder is Omaha World-Herald chief investigative reporter; Temple is AP general sports editor in New York; Brown is AP bureau chief in Los Angeles; Freeman is AP bureau chief in Raleigh, North Carolina, and van Swearingen is AP bureau chief in Helena. Freeman resigned in April 1980 and Temple was promoted to AP managing editor in September 1980.

<sup>5</sup>The office of state treasurer was not included in the 1972 Constitution. The 1975 Legislature passed a bill reinstating it but the bill was vetoed by Gov. Thomas Judge. In January 1977, the duties of the state treasurer were assumed by the department of administration.

congressmen, five western district congressmen, and numerous public service commissioners and Supreme Court associate justices.

The month before he retired the state recognized his personal library housed in his home as a state special library. It is listed on the fourteen-page "Directory of Special Libraries and Special Information Centers" bulletin published in September 1979, by a committee comprising librarians from six state agencies.

Winding stairs lead to that library--the storehouse for mementos, files, notebooks, and the famous "Black Book" compiled during his newspaper career, which spanned four decades. His library also contains his Legislative Black Books, Legislative Clip Books, Legislative House and Senate Journals from 1949-1977, and Sessions Laws from 1949-1977, as well as numerous books on finance--one of his specialties as a reporter.

While his library is not open to the public, he frequently receives telephone calls, particularly from reporters, requesting information on elections and state government.

Other mementos in the library tell much about the man. The walls on the steps leading up from the kitchen as well as the walls in the library are covered with photos of governors and other dignitaries he has known, his fraternity initiation certificate, a newspaper front page with a story

about Holmes the chess champion, his college diploma, photos of his parents and the man for whom he was named, two certificates of appreciation from the Montana Highway Commission, his retirement plaque from the Associated Press, a photo of Holmes with his "three angels," silhouettes of his three children, a photo of Holmes in an Army Air Corps uniform, and more that relate his history.

## CHAPTER I

The familiar "By J. D. Holmes"--the byline Montanans read almost daily for thirty years--is one of five names by which J. D. has been known. His parents called him Defrees; school friends knew him as Dee; in the Army Air Corps, he was called Joseph, and until soon after he went to work for the Associated Press in Helena, his byline was J. Defrees Holmes.

His parents named him for Joseph H. Defrees, his godfather and a man for whom his father had worked as a private secretary. Defrees owned two hotels in Chicago, was at one time president of the United States Chamber of Commerce, and was a partner in what Holmes described as a "then prestigious"<sup>1</sup> Chicago law firm of Defrees, Buckingham, and Eaton.

No one ever called him by his first name except in the military. "I had a hell of a time with people calling me Joseph there. Joseph didn't feel like me."<sup>2</sup>

He likes the nickname Dee, the name by which childhood, high school, and college friends still know him.

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with J. D. Holmes, Helena, Montana, October 5, 1979. Subsequent footnotes for interviews with Holmes give the date only.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

After he went to work for the Associated Press and saw what Montana newspaper editors did with J. Defrees, he quickly shortened it to J. D. "They would capitalize the "f" and besides, people were unsure what to call me. I did it for simplification.<sup>3</sup>

Holmes prefers the name Defrees. He has always signed legal documents J. Defrees Holmes and that is the name that appears on the mailbox at the family home in Helena.

He recalls that as a child he would ride his tricycle to one of the Windermere hotels Defrees owned about a block from the Holmes family's apartment.

I was a friendly, cute, little, red-headed guy and would tell the doorman at the hotel: "I'm Joseph Defrees." Usually the doorman would buy me an ice cream cone.

As young as I was, if I could find the right person, I could get an ice cream cone.

That was the advantage of my name. It is unusual but I have always liked it--maybe because of my early experiences.<sup>4</sup>

The name also brought \$1,000 for his college education. "When Joseph Defrees died, he felt obligated to leave me money,"<sup>5</sup> Holmes said.

And it brought a degree of respect because Defrees was widely known in Chicago. "In college, we debated the John Marshall School of Law over a Chicago radio station.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Their debate coach asked me if I was related to Joseph Defrees of Defrees, Buckingham, and Eaton."<sup>6</sup>

Holmes was born January 21, 1915, in Apartment 3-D at 5418 Woodlawn Avenue near the University of Chicago on the South Side. His birth certificate, a copy of which he keeps in a desk drawer in his office, lists Dr. George L. Brooks as the attending physician and a woman with the last name of Salomi as the midwife.<sup>7</sup>

He was the eldest son of Dwight Hamilton Holmes and Ruth Davis Holmes, both natives of southern Illinois. The Holmeses had two other children: Cynthia, born March 22, 1916, and Richard, born Christmas Day, 1917.

His father, who was born November 24, 1886, in Danville, Illinois, grew up and was graduated from high school in Danville where he also attended Brown's Business College.

At the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, Dwight Holmes was the attraction in a booth Brown's Business College set up for recruiting. "He typed blindfolded and people were amazed," J. D. said of his father's performance, noting

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Her first name was written so illegibly on the birth certificate that it is impossible to decipher.

<sup>8</sup>The St. Louis World's Fair, formally known as the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, was staged from April 30 to December 1, 1904 and commemorated the 100th anniversary of the purchase of Louisiana from France.

<sup>9</sup>October 5, 1979.



that male secretaries and typewriters were rarities at that time.

Dwight Holmes enrolled at the University of Illinois at Urbana where he lived in a boarding house. Many years later when J. D. was in high school, he and his father went to Urbana for a family funeral and stayed in the room his father had lived in while in college. "The same woman was still running the boarding house and it was immaculately clean."<sup>10</sup>

Dwight Holmes, who would have been in the Class of 1908, did not have enough money to remain in college and had to go to work after his freshman year.

Dwight, who also could take shorthand, began working as a roving court reporter. He would tie a rope around his typewriter and take it with him as he traveled from job to job. "He even brought it to Montana once."<sup>11</sup>

It was that same Underwood 5 that was toted all over the Midwest and Upper Plains states on which J. D. learned to type some twenty to twenty-five years later.

In 1910, Dwight Holmes went to work as a private secretary for Defrees in the Chicago law firm.

That same year Ruth Davis moved to Chicago. Born November 17, 1892, she grew up in Marion, Illinois, and was graduated from high school there.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

J. D. does not recall his mother ever having talked about working before she was married. He said she lived in Chicago with her older sister Louella and "claimed a distant cousin relationship to Jefferson Davis."<sup>12</sup>

The couple was married Saturday, November 15, 1913, by Rev. Charles W. Gilkey, a Baptist minister, at the home of Edgar J. Goodspeed, a professor of Biblical and Patristic Greek at the University of Chicago.

Holmes recalled that his parents were proud of having been married in Goodspeed's home because he was a noted Biblical authority. In 1923, Goodspeed published a common language translation of the New Testament called New Testament, An American Translation.

Holmes has a copy of the translation, which is autographed by Goodspeed and which has his mother's name imprinted in gold on the cover.

A newspaper account of the wedding described Goodspeed as "uncle of the bride" but J. D. questioned the validity of the statement because he does not remember his parents ever talking about Goodspeed as a relative.<sup>13</sup>

Shortly before his marriage to Ruth Davis, Dwight Holmes went to work as a private secretary for a Mr. Perkins of the International Harvester Company. Later, he went into the utility business.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

As their family expanded, the Holmeses moved to an apartment on Everett Avenue, then into a third apartment, on University Avenue. All were in the area of the University of Chicago.

It was the apartment building on University Avenue that a curious little Defrees nearly destroyed.

I was an experimenter. I got tar off the street on a warm day and put it in a cardboard box. I lit a fire under it--to melt it, I guess.

This little experiment took place on a third floor wooden back porch. Luckily, the place didn't burn down.<sup>14</sup>

A neighbor spotted him and called the fire department. The apartment building was later torn down; the University of Chicago fieldhouse now occupies the site.

About the time Holmes started grade school, the family moved into its first house, a duplex that his parents owned jointly with a Chicago polic detective. The home was at 5834 Harper Avenue and faced the Illinois Central Railroad or IC as it is commonly known to commuters.

"I learned to read before I went to school. I guess I was a gifted child,"<sup>15</sup> Holmes said as he reminisced about reading Rover Boys and Tom Swift books as a child.

"I can remember being sick in bed on Harper Avenue with the mumps and that there was a new Tom Swift book out. My mother called and they delivered it from Marshall Field's. It's my idea of the greatest store in the world."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

Reflecting on the change the electronic media have made on reading habits, Holmes said, "I wonder how many sick kids today would be asking for a book? Probably mom would move the TV in the bedroom."<sup>17</sup>

Holmes started school at an older age than most children do.

I'm not sure why but I did not start school until I was seven or eight years old. Then, I was in the first grade only a month or so. The teacher came to the house and said I was bored in school and that there was no use in my being in the first grade.<sup>18</sup>

His first attempt at writing got him in trouble. "I can remember in the third or fourth grade writing spooky ghost stories and reading them to my brother and sister to scare them. I can remember, too, Dad hollering at me when I did."<sup>19</sup>

He and his grade school friends' favorite playground after school and on Saturdays was the University of Chicago Stagg Field. They played in the stands during football practice. "Amos Alonzo Stagg was the coach and I can still see him. My last memory of him was in a wheelchair coaching."<sup>20</sup>

In 1942, Stagg Field became famous when Enrico Fermi and a team of scientists initiated the world's first self-sustaining nuclear reaction there.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

Another happy memory Holmes has of his grade school years is going to movies on Sunday afternoons. "Dad would take us to the movies at the Tivola Theater and there would be live acts on stage between movies. Whoever was famous would appear there."<sup>21</sup>

The ornate Trianon ballroom was in that area of Chicago also. "Famous bands played there. That's where everyone went."<sup>22</sup>

Radio was born in the 1920s with the initial broadcast on Election Night 1920 by station KDKA in Pittsburgh.

Nearly eight years after the first broadcast the Dwight Holmes family purchased its first radio. "We listened through the wall to the first Dempsey-Tunney fight on the detective's radio,"<sup>23</sup> Holmes said. That title fight was September 23, 1926, when he was eleven years old.

The Holmeses bought a radio the following summer. Holmes recalls that his mother and the three children went to Estes Park, Colorado, on vacation and that his father had stayed home. Soon after the family returned home, Dwight Holmes ordered the radio.

When the delivery man brought the radio set I was was the only one home. I didn't wait. I plugged it in and blew a tube. I didn't tell anyone. My parents never knew. I should have left it alone.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

His father came home to listen to his radio only to find that the department store had sent him what he thought was a faulty set. He called the store, a new set was delivered, and the Holmes family listened to the second Dempsey-Tunney fight in September 1927, on its own radio.

Years later, a radio-phonograph was to be the "first big purchase"<sup>25</sup> made by Holmes and his wife, Bert.

Holmes has fond memories of growing up on the South Side and is not happy that the neighborhood around the University of Chicago where he played as a child now has a high crime rate. He said he has talked to several persons who have confirmed that it is now unsafe to be on the streets there after dark.

The family left the South Side to migrate to the suburbs when Holmes was in the seventh grade. They moved to Kenilworth on the North Shore. "The North Shore was the place to go then,"<sup>26</sup> Holmes said.

In Kenilworth, Holmes finished grade school at the public Joseph Sears School and became involved in Boy Scouts in which his writing skills were to result in an award.

"We had a good scoutmaster and an active troop. Everyone was fully uniformed. Now, scouts wear only their scouting shirts. It's not anything like it was then."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

Holmes was a Star Scout but never became an Eagle Scout because an Eagle Scout had to have a lifesaving merit badge and, at the time, he could not swim.

He earned the Press Club Quill Badge for writing and getting articles about scouting published in community newspapers. "I was the first scout in the Chicago area council to earn this badge and was prouder of it than any of my merit badges."<sup>28</sup>

Holmes attended New Trier High School in the nearby suburb of Winnetka and notes that Time magazine recently listed it as one of the ten best high schools in the nation.

He did not participate in extracurricular activities during high school but spent his extra hours tinkering with a ham radio and, with three other students, publishing an independent newspaper at New Trier for two or three months.

The newspaper was a money-making scheme. One student had a hand printing press. "Two of us would gather gossip and other items" and write them for the one-page paper. The other two set the type and printed the newspaper, which was published "almost weekly." The enterprising quartet would then sell it in the cafeteria during lunch, earning a few cents on each paper.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>February 19, 1980.

"Pennies meant something then. Now you don't even want them in your pocket,"<sup>30</sup> Holmes said.

His other writing adventure in high school led him to a part-time summer job. "Hydrox" ice cream sponsored a contest writing advertising jingles in which Holmes won a book of coupons for free sundaes and ice cream sodas. He used the coupons at a drug store owned by a man named Walter Doerr, who hired him to work at the soda fountain one summer. The drug store also was the ticket office for the Milwaukee, Chicao, and North Shore Railroad, which had a station across the street.

W9DCI were the call numbers of his amateur radio station. On the wall of his office in his Helena home, Holmes has both his Radio Operator, Amateur Class, and Amateur Radio Station licenses he received while in high school.

He and a friend named Alex Newton, a neighbor and fellow ham operator, both benefited from living near Paul Davis, president of the Chicago Stock Exchange and another ham enthusiast. "He had an expensive setup and would give us equipment to prevent our stations from interfering with his."<sup>31</sup>

Another friend, Roger Barrett, had a father who collected autographs of famous people, unusual documents,

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.



and rare books. Oliver Barrett, who had a relative employed full time to catalog his collections, also would entertain celebrities in his home.

Holmes recalled listening to Count Felix von Luckner, the famous German World War I "Sea Deveil," speak at an assembly at New Trier High, then going to Roger's house after school to find Von Luckner a guest in the Barrett home.<sup>32</sup>

Another time, Holmes was bounding up the stairs to Roger's room and nearly stepped on a man seated on a landing reading a book. The man reprimanded him: "Slow down, young man. What's your name?" He told him Holmes and the man began talking about the American author and poet Oliver Wendell Holmes. The man on the step was Carl Sandburg.<sup>33</sup>

Holmes' Aunt Louella, his mother's sister, paid for a summer course for him at the Field Museum of Natural History while he was in high school. He described it as an enrichment course and said, "When you were done with it, you had the knowledge to be a guide in the museum."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>In World War I, following the Battle of Jutland (1916), Von Luckner slipped through the British blockade in the auxiliary cruiser Seeadler, of which he was commander, and preyed on Allied shipping in both the Atlantic and Pacific, with devastating effect, until he was run down near Fiji in 1918. After the war, he traveled widely as a lecturer.

<sup>33</sup>February 19, 1980.

<sup>34</sup>October 5, 1979.

Another summer she paid for a course at the Chicago Art Institute. Holmes recalls the classes were "interesting," but that he disliked having to sketch works of art. "I felt foolish drawing statues in the halls of the Art Institute with people watching me, because I couldn't draw. I don't have much artistic ability."<sup>35</sup>

He also noted he saw as a "kid" in the Museum of Natural History the King Tut exhibit that people traveled miles to see when it toured the United States in 1978.

Holmes was graduated from high school in 1932 and, as a gift, spent the summer at a dude ranch in Wyoming. That experience first brought him to the West, where he would spend most of his adult life.

He traveled on the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad to Sheridan, then was driven to the ranch near Story, Wyoming. Carl Pearson, assistant dean of men at Northwestern University in Chicago, and Dick Bard, superintendent of the state fish hatchery at Story, had set up Camp Red Cloud for city boys.

"That's where my interest in the West started,"<sup>36</sup> Holmes recalled. He returned to the ranch in the summers of 1933 and 1934, working in the kitchen and corrals for part of his board and room.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

Despite the urging of a cousin and friends to attend larger universities--Northwestern and the University of Illinois--and join their fraternities, Holmes chose Lake Forest University. "I went there because there was a better chance to have an identity at a smaller school."<sup>37</sup>

At Lake Forest, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree, Holmes majored in economics, joined the Kappa Sigma fraternity, was manager of the basketball team, acted in drama productions, participated in debate, and wrote a column for The Stentor, the college's student newspaper.

While no journalism major was offered at Lake Forest, Holmes was the anonymous author of what he called a "chit-chat" column known as the "Scandalight." The column was abolished by school officials after about two years when Holmes reported the obnoxious behavior of a student at a college dance. The student's uncle happened to be on the Lake Forest University board of trustees.

Holmes recalled that he ran a heavy black border around his final column to mourn its death. In truth, however, he was not terribly disturbed by the forced end to his column. "It had become a lot of work because it had grown to a full page. It was the most popular page in the paper. I would watch people and they would turn to it first"<sup>38</sup> before reading the rest of the newspaper.

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

His parents moved from Kenilworth while Holmes was in college to a community north of there called Lake Bluff.

When I was about half way through college, Dad had some financial reversals. Sacrificing to keep their kids in college, my parents moved to a cheaper home.<sup>39</sup>

Lake Bluff, however, was far from a poverty area. The entrance to Marshall Field's Estate was about one block from the Holmes residence at 345 Sylvan Road.

Holmes was graduated from college in June 1936, and spent that summer at Lake Bluff loafing and playing tennis. In late August, he climbed on his motorcycle and headed for Wyoming.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER II

"I was pretty broke when I got to Wyoming,"<sup>1</sup> Holmes said as he recalled stopping at a filling station in Sheridan where a man offered to buy his motorcycle. He sold the cycle and found a room above a business on the main street.

Montgomery Ward had just opened a store in Sheridan and Holmes went to work there as a salesperson. This was the only job Holmes had that was not related to journalism until he retired from the Associated Press in 1978 and lobbied during the 1979 session of the Montana Legislature.

He worked at Montgomery Ward through the Christmas season and sold job printing on the side for Archie L. Nash, who owned and operated the biweekly Sheridan News.

After Christmas of 1936, he returned to Dick Bard's ranch near Story, Wyoming, where he spent the winter. When it snowed, he plowed the road to town some two miles away, using a team of horses and a "V" wood plow, and he helped out on the ranch to earn room and board.

With no newspaper job in sight in Wyoming, he left the ranch in the spring of 1937 and headed to Wichita, Kansas, where his father had friends in the utility business.

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with J. D. Holmes, Helena, Montana, October 5, 1979. Subsequent footnotes for interviews with Holmes give the date only.

He went to see a lawyer friend of his father's who knew the Levand brothers, owners of the Wichita Beacon.

"He introduced me with the usual story about a friend's kid and I got a job as a cub reporter for \$10 a week,"<sup>2</sup> Holmes said.

The Beacon was a large daily and had about twenty to thirty people in the newsroom. An AP writer filed his stories from a small office in the corner of the newsroom. Experienced reporters earned \$12.50 a week, veteran reporters \$25.

One-fourth of Holmes' salary--\$2.50 a week--went for the room he shared at the YMCA.

He ate his meals at a 1930s version of a McDonald's restaurant. It was called the "White Tower" hamburger chain and one restaurant was situated between the YMCA and the newspaper office in Wichita.

He would buy two nickel hamburgers and one glass of chocolate milk, which also cost a nickel. Then he would have the milk aerated so it foamed up and he had two glasses of chocolate milk--one for each hamburger. He usually ate with his roommate, a truck driver, or another cub reporter and, predictably, had a girlfriend working in the restaurant who "would see that I got extra-good food."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

His first assignment as a cub reporter was the livestock and police beats. He spent mornings in the Wichita stockyards and afternoons in the police station.

Holmes recalled wearing a pair of cowboy boots from his Wyoming days on his rounds through the stockyards each morning. He kept the boots and a cane in the press room at the stockyards. "I felt like a real Westerner with the boots and cane."<sup>4</sup>

He would wander through the labyrinth of corrals, cane in hand, prodding cows out of the way as he looked for "color" stories from the stockyards. The western attire helped him become acquainted with the buyers who were in the yards looking over herds before making purchases.

After his trip through the yards, he would go to the commission houses and look through the slips made out by buyers when they purchased cattle and hogs. He copied the high and low figures paid per pound and phoned them in for the Beacon's daily Wichita livestock market report.

The Associated Press then picked it up so that, actually, it was Holmes who provided the Wichita livestock market for the Associated Press.

He also had to provide a summary of the livestock market and a prediction of the next day's market for page one of the late street edition. The tabular highs and lows as well as color stories appeared on the inside of the main

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

edition of the evening paper which was off the press by midafternoon.

"I got pretty good at it,"<sup>5</sup> Holmes said of his predictions. A lawyer friend read the predictions faithfully and told Holmes that he occasionally made money on them.

His first bylined story came from neither the stockyard nor police beat, but appeared above a first-person story about his experiences obtaining a Kansas driver's license.

As police reporter in the afternoon, his instructions were: "Keep an eye on things and do your best to provide us with a headline for replate."<sup>6</sup>

A shooting he covered left a lasting impression. He was in the press room of the police station when a report of the shooting in a tenement across the street came over the loudspeaker. Anxious to get the headline for the replate edition, he beat the police to the scene. From a courtyard inside the building, he could see a crowd gathered up two floors, and he dashed up the steps.

The victim had shot himself with an old Iver Johnson revolver in a bathroom shared by tenants on that floor. "I think the shell had been in the gun for years. He tore his mouth up badly, staggered down the hall back to his room and

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.



collapsed."<sup>7</sup> A trail of blood led from the bathroom to the man's room outside which the crowd was gathered. Holmes opened the door, entered and found what appeared to be a corpse laying in a pool of blood. Unsure what to do, Holmes, who recalled that he "wanted to be a big police reporter,"<sup>8</sup> stood there and gazed at the apparently lifeless form. Suddenly, it spoke, "go away, leave me alone." "I almost jumped out of my shoes,"<sup>9</sup> Holmes said.

The victim turned out to be an ex-convict and Holmes had just the type of headline the desk liked for the street edition, which always had a front page printed on pink or pale orange paper.

Holmes laughingly notes that it was in this same pink edition that the Beacon erroneously found Amelia Earhart two or three times. "Such stories sold a lot of extra papers."<sup>10</sup>

Then a letter came from Archie Nash in Sheridan. It contained the offer of a higher salary and the opportunity to live in the West again. So with his other belongings, Holmes packed the Underwood Noiseless Portable purchased with money he had saved in Wichita and returned to northern Wyoming to work for Nash on the Sheridan News.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

"Nash was good at writing editorials and selling ads. My job was to fill up the rest of the paper with news," Holmes said. The newspaper was published Wednesdays and Saturdays as "really sort of an advertising paper."<sup>11</sup>

An overline above the nameplate stated "For Complete Local and State News--Read" [The Sheridan News] but the priorities Nash set for his newspaper were revealed in the masthead, which stated "Advertising That Is Effective--Circulation That Is Complete--News That Is Interesting," in that order.

The news columns were intended to build circulation and interest in the newspaper so advertising could be attracted and the newspaper could succeed financially. News' competition with the daily Sheridan Press heightened the need for readership and often resulted in sensationalism.

The News did carry routine news from the court house, rewrites of stories from large dailies in the state, school news, and a social column filled with items about birthday parties, travels, guests, births, deaths, and other items.

The Sheridan News' social column was called "Home Town Notes and Folks." Among the items reported in one such column are:

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

Sheridan visitors to Gillette this week included: R.K. Dunning, Bert Brooks, P.E. Madsen Roy Feagere, Miss Dorothy Burns, W.S. Guyer and P.C. Duncan.

The News congratulates Mr. and Mrs. George Lix of Lodge Grass, Mont., on the birth of a son Wednesday at the Sheridan County Memorial hospital.

Dr. and Mrs. James W. Sampson and daughter, Mary Ann, are spending the Thanksgiving holidays with the doctor's parents in Kemmerer. They expect to return Sunday. . . .

The V.F.W. Auxiliary held its regular meeting last night in the K.P. Hall. . . .

Miss Mary Jane Yates, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E.M. Yates, was recently initiated into Sigma Epsilon Sigma, national honorary scholastic freshman society. Miss Yates, a sophomore at the University of Missouri, was elected to the society on the basis of her first-year grades. . . .

A grammar school romance terminated successfully last week in Los Angeles when Wallace Wilbur O'Conner and Vivian Zeretha Higgins were married in the Methodist Church. . . .

Miss Iris Ferren entertained 16 of her friends Wednesday evening, the occasion being her sixteenth birthday. The evening was spent with games and riddles. A delicious lunch completed the party. Those present were . . .

#### FUNERAL NOTICE

OLSON, John O.--Services will be held at 1 o'clock Saturday afternoon at the Champion Funeral Home. The Rev. Carl A. Lofgren will officiate.<sup>12</sup>

"I did some dumb things on the paper at Sheridan,"<sup>13</sup> Holmes said as he looked at the sensational story he wrote with the headline "Is General Custer Alive Today?"<sup>14</sup> The account of a speech delivered to a service club was the lead story on page one December 8, 1937. The second deck of the headline read: "Believe Custer Visited Local

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<sup>12</sup>Sheridan (Wyom.) News, November 27, 1937, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup>October 5, 1979.

<sup>14</sup>Custer was born in 1839.

Attorney's Office Last Year." The third deck explained the source: "George Layman Tells Lions of Beliefs."

The story told how Layman, an attorney, was "convinced that Mr. R. E. McNally, a brother attorney, talked to General Custer a few days before the 1936 Hardin Custer celebration."<sup>15</sup> Holmes ended the news story by editorializing:

Could it have been that Custer did visit McNally? Could it be that Custer is alive today? Layman's presentation of the story makes it seem not only possible but also highly probable.<sup>16</sup>

The newspaper began a war on the "unholy trio" of gambling, alcohol, and prostitution November 17, 1937, Holmes' first issue of the News. And Holmes remembers having to work in the dark one night to get the paper printed because he and Nash feared what Holmes described as the "rough element."<sup>17</sup>

In a front-page editorial with the headline "The Unholy Trio," Nash launched his campaign. He advocated control--not elimination--of gambling, prostitution, and drinking:

. . . it is realized that the problem where these three favorite vices of man are concerned, is not one of elimination or suppression but one of regulation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Sheridan (Wyom.) News, December 8, 1937, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>17</sup>October 5, 1979.

<sup>18</sup>Sheridan (Wyom.) News, November 17, 1937, p. 1.

Not in favor of prohibition which he said "did more to debauch the morals of the nation than any one other thing,"<sup>19</sup> Nash warned "the public to drink moderately and not to mix their [sic] alcohol with gambling and gasoline."<sup>20</sup> He had no answer to the gambling problem and stated only that "the Average Citizen cannot agree with his neighbor just what should be done."<sup>21</sup> His campaign against prostitution consisted of moving it from the rooming houses on main street to a segregated "Red Light District." He said attempts to eliminate prostitution would not work because:

. . . As long as men are creatures of passion there will be women willing to sell them the use of their bodies.

Again as it is with gambling and drinking, the problem is not one of suppression but one of control and regulation.<sup>22</sup>

Holmes' first story about vice appeared on page eight of November 24, 1937, as a rewrite of a Casper newspaper's story about closing down gambling in that city. In the following issue, November 27, 1937, he wrote his first page-one story about gambling: "Casper Gamblers Work Here." The second deck: "Ejected from Oil City; Now 'Roosting' Here."

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Sheridan (Wyom.) News, November 20, 1937, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Sheridan (Wyom.) News, November 24, 1937, p. 1.

Casper gamblers--recently thrown out of employment by the clamping of the lid on all gambling in the oil city--have found new jobs--that of "come-on" men for the local houses of chance.

The Casper gamblers have been trickling in Sheridan ever since the fireworks there, it was learned from the members of the Sheridan police department. Finding Casper "too hot" for comfort, others are following the vanguard here, it was reported.<sup>23</sup>

That evening officials shut down gambling in Sheridan.

In the next issue, his vice story carried the banner headline "Rumors Plague Main Street," over a story about the future of gambling in Sheridan.

Main street was plagued with rumors--and rumors of rumors--Tuesday as dust gathered on the gambling tables and spiders spun cobwebs on the roulette wheels in the city gaming rooms, deserted since the clamping down of the lid Saturday night.<sup>24</sup>

His next story about vice also carried a banner headline: "Two Jolts Wound Local Vice." The story about the closure of "bawdy houses" on main street appeared on page one Saturday, December 18, 1938.

Open vice on main street was struck another blow yesterday afternoon when a couple was arrested in one of the houses which had received an ultimatum from Acting Chief of Police Fred James Thursday. . . .<sup>25</sup>

News stories about gambling raids, prostitution being shut down, and liquor license protests were to appear periodically on the front page of the Sheridan News throughout 1938. In March, July, and August, gambling

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<sup>23</sup>Sheridan (Wyom.) News, November 27, 1937, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup>Sheridan (Wyom.) News, December 1, 1937, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup>Sheridan (Wyom.) News, December 18, 1937, p. 1.

raids and the subsequent destruction of gaming devices such as roulette tables, cards, and slot machines all received banner headlines on the front page.

Holmes described the anti-vice campaign as meeting "with some success"<sup>26</sup> but noted that economically for the Sheridan News it did not matter because "you'd been getting interest in your paper and increasing circulation."<sup>27</sup>

He covered his first election in 1938. From June when filing for office began through the primary in August and the general election in November, short news stories about individuals filing for office, candidates making appearances in Sheridan, and the elections themselves dominated the front page of the Sheridan News.

Holmes sat through his first autopsy in April 1938 and found the experience gruesome. "I can still remember every incision that was made"<sup>28</sup> when they peeled the scalp back in search of bruises under the skin to determine if the man had died of head wounds, Holmes said. He took pictures of the autopsy but when the death turned out to be a suicide, no photos were printed. The lead story April 30, 1938, carried the headline: "Death of Sarkowitz Suicide, Jury Finds" and a second deck of "Bruise on Head Is Not Cause of Death, Claimed."

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<sup>26</sup>February 20, 1980

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

His lone bylined story in the News was a feature April 13, 1938, about a tramp printer named Nathan Bergman, who billed himself as "The Wandering Jew." Holmes had become acquainted with Bergman when he typed all the copy for an eight-page newspaper Bergman published about himself called "Highway and Boxcar Ramblings of TRAMP PRINTER." The feature story in the News was accompanied by a photo of Bergman in a railroad boxcar and began with the lead:

Residing temporarily in Sheridan this week is a man actually famous in his particular sphere, a man literally without a home, a man who may well be termed the dean of an almost extinct species--the tourist or "boomer" printer.<sup>29</sup>

Holmes was the stringer for United Press in Sheridan and recalled receiving a late-night call from Wyoming's office of United Press in Cheyenne where reporters had heard the governor had had some difficulty during an appearance in Sheridan. Holmes, who seems to have an innate ability to cultivate sources, had attended the public appearance and had gone to a restaurant afterward to have coffee with the governor. He reported to United Press in Cheyenne he was sure there was no truth to the rumor because "I just left him 15 minutes ago."<sup>30</sup> While rumors such as this can take a news service hours to check out, no time was wasted and no story was written about the false rumor.

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<sup>29</sup>Sheridan (Wyom.) News, April 13, 1938, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup>February 20, 1980.



"I can't imagine writing all that stuff. No wonder I didn't have any time to socialize,"<sup>31</sup> Holmes said as he looked through the bound volumes of the News he keeps in a closet in his office.

His social life in Sheridan consisted of playing chess with another bachelor, John Raper. Raper, a lawyer, is now the chief justice of the Wyoming Supreme Court.<sup>32</sup>

Competing with the daily Sheridan Press in the town of 12,000 became increasingly difficult for Nash and in November 1938 he cut publication to Thursdays only. In a front-page notice to his readers, he stated:

Mounting production costs without additional gains in revenue makes this move imperative--at least for a short while. It is in keeping with the efforts being made by most small papers in the nation and many of the larger ones to survive under the ever increasing costs of production.<sup>33</sup>

He had hoped to resume publication twice a week, but on March 2, 1939, the News was discontinued. In a front-page announcement, Nash said:

Much as we regret it, we have been forced to come to the conclusion that two papers cannot operate profitably in Sheridan, especially when one is as well established and well liked as the Sheridan Press. . . .

On Sept. 28, 1935, the present management became the owners of the Sheridan News and articles of incorporation were filed.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Telephone interview with Martha Coonrod, deputy clerk of the Wyoming Supreme Court, February 25, 1980.

<sup>33</sup> Sheridan (Wyom.) News, November 19, 1938, p. 1.

Since that time, we have strived to conduct our publication according to the high tenets of journalism. We have tried to keep the community's interests and welfare upper most at all times and to publish the truth as we knew it regardless where the chips fell, believing that is an obligation and responsibility every newspaper man owes to his readers. We have held throughout that publishing the truth without any glossing over has the same wholesome effect on political corruption and community immorality as that of the sun's rays on the mold and slime of the dank places.

In doing so, we have necessarily caused wounds and made enemies but we can truthfully say there never has been anything personal in our statements and that we end our publishing career with no ill-feeling or malice to anyone.<sup>34</sup>

Holmes returned to Illinois for a short visit. His father wanted him to get involved in community newspapers in Illinois which Holmes described as a "lucrative investment"<sup>35</sup> at the time, but Holmes headed west again.

Just two and a half months after the death of the Sheridan News, Holmes published his first issue of the Sweet Grass News in Big Timber, Montana.

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<sup>34</sup>Sheridan (Wyom.) News, March 2, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup>October 5, 1979.

### CHAPTER III

Have you heard the one about a country newspaper editor who retired with a fortune?

When asked the secret of his success, he replied: "I attribute my ability to retire with \$100,000 savings, after thirty years in newspaper work, to diligent application to work, pursuing a policy of strict honesty, always practicing rules of economy and to the death of my uncle five years ago who died leaving me \$110,000."<sup>1</sup>

Holmes, who ran the above story in his "Talk of the Town" column in the Sweet Grass News, says it appropriately describes the weekly editor who must invest money and work long hours to earn a living.

After visiting his parents in Illinois, Holmes returned West in his first car, a used Chevrolet, in search of a weekly newspaper to buy, "practically for free."<sup>2</sup>

He drove from Sheridan to Billings to see Bill Sigourney, manager of the Western Newspaper Union, who had sold supplies to the Sheridan News and had contacts throughout Wyoming and Montana.

Signourney told Holmes the Sweet Grass News was run down, that its editor, Ross Shaver, was an old printer who

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<sup>1</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, July 24, 1940, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Interview with J. D. Holmes, Helena, Montana, February 26, 1980. Subsequent footnotes for interviews with Holmes give the date only.

wanted to sell, and that "I could buy a majority of the stock for practically nothing."<sup>3</sup>

Holmes went to Big Timber to meet Shaver and the two other principal stockholders--Bob Bray, who operated a variety store, and Con Ullman, owner of a lumber company.

"When I called on them, they saw that I got enough stock to take over. The price was just enough money so Shaver and his family could pack up and move to California."<sup>4</sup>

Before purchasing the paper,<sup>5</sup> Holmes returned to Sheridan and asked Leon Jezewski, a printer at the Sheridan Press, to determine if a newspaper could continue to be published in the News print shop.

I borrowed Leon, paid his expenses and drove him to Big Timber. I wanted his expertise in looking over the equipment. Leon told me it looked like I could get out a few issues but that I badly need a new Linotype.<sup>6</sup>

Holmes, who had limited printing experience, said his meeting with Ray Beck was the "best break I had in getting started in the weekly newspaper business."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>The final purchase agreement provided for \$500 down and an additional \$500 to be paid in installments of \$10/month for the 45 percent of the stock Shaver owned.

<sup>6</sup>February 26, 1980.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

During a trip between Sheridan and Big Timber, Holmes stopped to visit Hollis and Helen Johnson,<sup>8</sup> publishers of the Hardin Tribune-Herald, who introduced him to Beck. Unemployed at the time, Beck had worked for the Johnsons on a weekly newspaper in Torrington, Wyoming.

"If Beck hadn't been such a good printer, we probably wouldn't have made it,"<sup>9</sup> Holmes said. Beck cleaned up the Model 1 Linotype. The holes the lead came out of to make the slugs were plugged and had to be drilled out.

The lead story of the first issue carried the banner headline "Ross Shaver Leaves For Coast" and this "Announcement" in a front-page box:

After more than 15 years of continuous operation under the direction of Ross E. Shaver, the News appears today with a new editor-manager in charge.

J. Defrees Holmes has purchased from Shaver the controlling interest in the stock of the Sweet Grass Publishing Company. Holmes, an energetic and pleasant young man, comes to Big Timber well recommended from Sheridan, Wyoming, where for the past one and one-half years he has edited the Sheridan News and served as United Press correspondent. . . . Holmes received his early newspaper training as a livestock and police reporter for the Wichita, Kansas, Beacon.

A Republican in politics, Holmes brings to Big Timber many modern ideas which should make the News one of the most interesting and progressive weekly newspapers in Montana. Equipment at the News office is being completely overhauled under the supervision

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<sup>8</sup>Helena Johnson Peterson was appointed to the Montana State Board of Equalization January 31, 1973, becoming the first woman on that board. In 1980, she was chairman of the Montana Tax Appeals Board.

<sup>9</sup>February 26, 1980.

of Ray Beck. New additions are being planned which will enable the plant to produce job work of the finest quality.

The Sweet Grass Publishing Company wishes to thank the people of the community for the loyal support given the News during the past 15 years. We believe that Holmes will merit a continuance of this support and will do his best to give us a newspaper dedicated to the welfare and upbuilding of Sweet Grass County.

SWEET GRASS PUBLISHING COMPANY

By R. A. Bray, President<sup>10</sup>  
C. F. Ullman, Secretary

Almost immediately Holmes began looking for a new Linotype. He found one at the Sheridan Press. "It was a newer model--a Mergenthaler Model 5--and I could get a good deal."<sup>11</sup> But, money was a problem.

I went to the Citizen's Bank and Trust Co. to borrow the \$500 to buy the used Linotype. I was pretty new there [Big Timber], things were tough, and they weren't going to loan me the money.<sup>12</sup>

So, he appealed to his father--not to borrow money but shares of Kansas Power and Light stock for collateral. Both his father and the bank agreed.

The new Linotype was announced on the front page of the July 5, 1939, issue:

With the installation this week of a new typesetting machine--a factory rebuilt Mergenthaler Linotype--and the earlier purchases of new job type faces and other equipment, the Sweet Grass News now boasts a print shop unexcelled in but very few towns the size of Big Timber.

Installed Saturday evening and Sunday morning, the new News Linotype--which has an overall weight of approximately 2,700 pounds--is now ready for service

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<sup>10</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, May 17, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup>February 26, 1980.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

and is capable of meeting every demand of either the newspaper reader, advertiser or purchaser of job printing supplies.<sup>13</sup>

He sold the old Linotype to "a guy starting a weekly in Gardiner for a \$100 or so to get it out of my hair."<sup>14</sup>

The newer Linotype was not the only thing Holmes brought to Big Timber from Sheridan; he also printed the same slogans and columns in the Montana weekly.

He copied for the first several months the overline or streamer above the nameplate "For Complete Local and State News, Read," and used the gossip column name "Hometown Notes and Folks."

While he took the slogan "Advertising That Is Effective, Circulation That Is Complete, News That Is Interesting" from the masthead of the Sheridan paper and used it under the nameplate of the Sweet Grass News, the latter was not as sensational in appearance. It lacked the bold, black, front-page headlines and, thus, had the appearance of a more serious publication.

He added two other columns from Sheridan later. His "Talk of the Town" editorial column appeared December 13, 1939, and the "Who Am I" feature column March 6, 1940.

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<sup>13</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, July 5, 1939, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup>February 26, 1980.

The "Who Am I" column, which ran continuously until the paper folded in May 1942, featured a person in the community each week. Readers, given information about the individual, were asked to guess the person's identity; the name was revealed the following week. While the column had several writers, its first was Ellen Ward, editor of the Sweet Grass County High student newspaper, The Sheepherder.

In his "Talk of the Town" column, Holmes related stories and jokes, commented on subjects ranging from the high school basketball team to the war and argued with the editor of the community's other weekly, the Big Timber Pioneer. His first column was introduced with this editor's note:

In response to a demand for a column of light-veined and yet fundamentally serious commentary on purely local issues--a media [sic] through which the city and county residents can taste of the trials and tribulations of their acquaintances--the News today initiates this "Talk of the Town."<sup>15</sup>

The first column attacked Jerome Williams, then in his twenty-seventh year as Pioneer editor:

COULD WE?

After twenty-seven years of fighting with our neighbors over practically anything and everything, could we feel proud to head the paragraphs in our Record of Achievements with: "First it fought . . . Then it had the Lions Club to contend with . . . Next came a fight with a portion of the businessmen . . . It fought a new public school building and high school gymnasium?"

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<sup>15</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, December 13, 1939, p. 1.



Could we honestly accuse our opposition of being controlled by "big interests" when our own paper regularly carries the advertising of those same interests and our opposition has never once even printed their names?

We couldn't.<sup>16</sup>

While Williams used editorials to attack Holmes, the editorials in the News usually were clipped from other papers.

"I never was much of an editorial writer but I always had columns going because I liked them."<sup>17</sup> Holmes said.

Holmes did write editorials about utilities. "I was interested in utilities because of my dad and thought the public needed to know more about them."<sup>18</sup>

One day Montana Power Company President Frank Bird visited the newspaper office to compliment Holmes on his understanding of utilities.

Apparently I ran enough that it caught the eyes of the boys in Butte. I was very flattered, being a young man working on a small weekly, to be visited by the big power company president.<sup>19</sup>

"My editorials at that time were pro-utility. I was trying to offset the idea that utilities were big ogres out

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>February 26, 1980.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

to get them [the consumers]. I tried to make utilities seem less of a villain.<sup>20</sup>

One editorial summarized his position:

Is it any wonder then that we have maintained week after week that advocates of socialized power are far less interested in benefiting "we, the people" than in disintegrating the \$14-billion private electric industry.

It has contributed increasingly to government through constantly rising taxes. It is one of America's greatest resources.<sup>21</sup>

He is still opposed to government ownership of utilities and does not think it should own railroads either. Disagreeing with Governor Thomas L. Judge's proposal in 1980 for Montana to take over the ailing Milwaukee Railroad, Holmes said:

Can you imagine political hacks [appointees] trying to run a railroad? Don't you think the Burlington Northern or another railroad would have jumped at the chance of taking the Milwaukee over if it thought it could make money?<sup>22</sup>

Louis Mysse, a sheepherder, wrote free-lance editorials for the News. "He turned out to be one hell of a writer,"<sup>23</sup> Holmes said. The October 23, 1940, News reported that a Mysse editorial would be broadcast by NBC radio.

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<sup>20</sup>April 17, 1980.

<sup>21</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, May 7, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup>April 17, 1980.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

Holmes and Helen Johnson Peterson fondly remember the editorial "An Open Letter to Mr. Walter Winchell" printed in the January 1, 1941, News.

Hollis and Helen Johnson had left for Salt Lake City, but the Bozeman Hill was impassable and they returned to Big Timber to celebrate New Year's Eve with Holmes. But first they had to put out the newspaper. Short on editorials, they went to a bar and composed the letter to Winchell.

"I wrote, J. D. looked over my shoulder, and Hollie just sat there and laughed. We had our little fun,"<sup>24</sup> the present chairman of the Montana Tax Appeals Board said of the joint effort. The editorial:

Dear Mr. Winchell:

You have one of the best spots in radio, and one of the largest audiences of any columnist on the air. We have always found your inside information and your chatter very amusing--but, Mr. Winchell, we don't think you are a statesman . . . and obviously, you do.

You constantly emphasize both through the medium of your newspaper column and your staccato comments that you feel the United States and the world are facing a crisis. We quite agree with you. These are troublous times for the democracies of the world.

But our democracy (and that of Great Britain) was born not of emotionalism but of sober thought and profound consideration. Now that our form of government is being tried in every part of the globe, we feel that our ideals must be strengthened not by rule of emotion but by more clear and serious thinking than the American people have ever used before.

A man does not use his grey matter to any great extent when he is involved in a fist fight or when he has the girl of his dreams in his arms. So we,

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<sup>24</sup>Interview with Helena Johnson Peterson, Helena, Montana, March 3, 1980.

the people, cannot think clearly when our greatest desire is to blast Hitler or when we are flushed with a pseudo-patriotism that goes no deeper than flag waving and band music.

When we are on a witch-hunt, it is hard to see anything but specters. We think, Mr. Winchell, that you are the leader in one of the most spectacular witch-hunts the world has ever known.

And just between you and us, we have a hunch the F.B.I. isn't too happy about all the publicity you are giving to some of the more prominent unAmericans--even federal agents can do little when their quarry is driven to cover.

So stick to your gossip, Mr. Winchell. Leave our more pressing problems to those who have the background, the education, and the mental ability to consider them with the coolness and the seriousness with which they must be handled.<sup>25</sup>

Winchell's reply to the editorial was printed in the January 22, 1941, News:

New York Mirror  
235 East 45th Street  
New York, New York  
January 14, 1941

Mr. J. Defrees Holmes  
Sweet Grass News  
Big Timber, Montana

Dear Editor:

Thanks for sending the open letter in your editorial columns of January 1st. Your next to the final paragraph of that missive is what I want to clarify, please.

When you say the FBI might not be too happy about giving publicity to the more prominent un-Americans, this is to tell you that they are mentioned by me after they have been! The sources are newspapers--stories about them that have broken. I mention them days, weeks, and months later--AGAIN! To remind the people they live among that they are still dangerous. I never mention those the enforcement groups are trailing or covering. You may confirm this with Mr. Hoover.

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<sup>25</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, January 1, 1941, p. 4.

If you see fit to publish this, please send me the clip.

good wishes,  
Walter Winchell<sup>26</sup>

Under the letter, Holmes printed:

We'll take your word for it, Mr. Winchell, and confess our error. In fact we'll apologize for printing that paragraph and thank you for setting us straight.

But, Mr. Winchell--where affairs that are national and international in scope are concerned--we still don't think you are a statesman . . . and can only repeat:

"Stick to your gossip!"<sup>27</sup>

"Treasure State News" was a regular feature on the front page. Containing summaries from dailies about items of statewide interest, it was printed because "a lot of the ranchers didn't get a daily paper,"<sup>28</sup> Holmes said.

He also printed a weekly United Press state news column written by Edward J. Heilman, UP staff correspondent. It was a tradeoff: Holmes was UP's stringer in Big Timber and in exchange received the column by mail.

"Readyprint" provided the national news and features in the News. The newsprint was purchased already printed on one side. The local news and ads were run on the other side. As a result, pages two and three as well as six and seven of an eight-page newspaper would contain national columns, photo features, news, and advertising.

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<sup>26</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, January 22, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>February 26, 1980.

"Most small weeklies used it."<sup>29</sup> Holmes said, noting the cost of the newsprint was slightly reduced when "readyprint" was used. He ordered his "readyprint" through the Western Newspaper Union in Billings and had some choice of the columns and features.

The Pioneer used "readyprint" from the Montana Newspaper Association in Great Falls: "I liked theirs better in some ways. It had Montana copy and advertising. The Western Newspaper Union's 'readyprint' was not so localized."<sup>30</sup>

When Holmes added three national columns--"Washington Merry-Go-Round," "Sportlight," and "The Once Over" in January 1940, he heralded it was a front-page story making it sound as if he had hired the writers instead of the columns being supplied on "readyprint." The headline stated: "4 Famed Writers Added to Staff."

With this issue of the Sweet Grass News, four nationally known writers--whose columns heretofore have been found only in the largest daily newspapers--become regular members of the News staff: They are:

Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen, probably the best known of Washington correspondents. [Washington Merry-Go-Round]

Grantland Rice, who writes with authority on sports. [Sportlight]

H. I. Phillips, the nation's premier newspaper humorist. [The Once Over]<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, January 10, 1940, p. 1

"I thought that was pretty smart. The man on the street didn't know it was readyprint and I don't think it was deception. I was telling the readers they could get these famous writers in my paper."<sup>32</sup>

Holmes also became involved in a press association, started an advertising service, and for a month was the publisher of a second weekly.

The South Montana Press Association<sup>33</sup> was organized May 1940. Holmes arranged for its first general meeting, in Big Timber.

Newspaper publishers from thirteen neighboring counties will gather in Big Timber this Saturday, Aug. 3, for an all-day business meeting and banquet--the first general meeting of the recently organized South Montana Press Association.

Officers of the association, all elected at Bozeman last May 25, are: Fred J. Ward of White Sulphur Springs, president; L. M. Prill of Billings, secretary-treasurer; O. H. P. Shelly of Red Lodge, first vice president; Karl Martenson of Whitehall, second vice president, and John W. Lyman of Bozeman, director.

.....  
 Toastmaster at the banquet will be A. L. Stone of Missoula, dean of the School of Journalism at Montana State University, who will arrive in Big Timber Friday evening. . . .<sup>34</sup>

At the meeting--to which the Pioneer's Williams sent his printer, Lowell Galbreth, but which Williams did not attend--the publishers adopted two resolutions:

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<sup>32</sup>April 17, 1980.

<sup>33</sup>The association included newspapers in fourteen counties: Big Horn, Broadwater, Carbon, Gallatin, Golden Valley, Jefferson, Meagher, Musselshell, Park, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Treasure, Yellowstone, and Wheatland.

<sup>34</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, July 31, 1940, p. 1.

In an effort to establish a standardized division between paid advertising and free publicity, members of the southern division of the Montana Press association in convention here Saturday resolved that "any item or story referring to any event or person which will result in financial gain or benefit for an individual, a corporation, an association, or an organization shall be classed as advertising and paid for as such."

The publishers from nine cities in the southern press district . . . also passed a resolution condemning the present unemployment compensation law in this state as it affects employers of eight persons or less.<sup>35</sup>

Helen Johnson Peterson said the Pioneer editor's absence was not unusual. Williams would not go to meetings if he knew Holmes would be present and did not print stories about events he knew Holmes planned to cover.<sup>36</sup>

Capitalizing on knowing weekly editors and liquor control board members,<sup>37</sup> Holmes founded a forerunner to the Montana Advertising Service--"Southern Montana Weekly Newspaper Advertising Network."

In 1941, Governor Sam Ford abolished the brokerage system for liquor purchases: "Hereafter, all purchases will be made directly from distilleries and wineries."<sup>38</sup> The executive order opened up competition and spurred advertising by liquor companies.

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<sup>35</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, August 7, 1940, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup>Interview with Helen Johnson Peterson, Helena, Montana, March 3, 1980.

<sup>37</sup>Two members were weekly editors: Ward, White Sulphur Springs, and Ashton Jones, Broadus.

<sup>38</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, February 5, 1941, p. 1.



To encourage them to advertise in weeklies, Holmes established a one-check, one-mailing system for the liquor companies in southern Montana weeklies. The companies would send him the insertion orders, mats, and payment and he would distribute them to his fellow editors, collecting a commission.

On a rate card, he promoted "one order, one bill, one check" for 25,778 circulation in sixteen weekly newspapers.<sup>39</sup> The total cost was \$6.44 a column inch.

Because I knew liquor control board members, I was able to set it up. They helped me make contacts with the liquor companies and I suspect put in a good word for me.<sup>40</sup>

While the liquor companies were his first clients, he expanded the advertising service, printing a folder to describe the sixteen weeklies and at least one subsequent rate card.

When Holmes enlisted in the military, Bert Baun--who was to become his wife after World War II--maintained the advertising service until a statewide advertising organization was established.

"I was always a little peeved about it, but

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<sup>39</sup>The weeklies were: Bozeman Courier, Big Timber Sweet Grass News, Billings Midland Review, Boulder Monitor, Laurel Outlook, Whitehall Jefferson Valley News, Red Lodge Pickett Journal and Carbon County News, Columbus News, Hardin Tribune-Herald, White Sulphur Springs Meagher County News, Harlowton Times, Roundup Record-Tribune, Ryegate Eastern Montana Clarion, Townsend Star, and Livingston Park County News.

<sup>40</sup>February 24, 1980.

I was away in the service and unable to do anything to stop it,"<sup>41</sup> Holmes said.

His bride-to-be came to Big Timber in June 1940, soon after her graduation from high school in Mobridge, South Dakota, where she, too, had edited a high school newspaper. Bert, who was born Bertha Louise Baun July 20, 1921, in Mobridge, had moved to Big Timber to help her pregnant sister, Fran Hager, with two small stepchildren.<sup>42</sup>

After her sister, whose husband owned the Ford dealership in Big Timber, no longer needed help, Bert went to work in Cole's Drug Store and later the Citizen's Bank. Holmes went to the drug store often for ice cream sundaes so he could see Bert.

In July 1941, he and Bert were at a movie when he was called to the phone.

The call was from a guy named Mahlum who wanted us to print the West Yellowstone paper. He was a hot-shot, fly-by-night promoter who could sell ads and had started a paper. He had someone in Bozeman printing it. I guess he wasn't paying his printing bills and was in a bind. I found that out later when he couldn't pay me.<sup>43</sup>

Holmes agreed to print the West Yellowstonian provided Mahlum paid the additional costs of overtime and

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>One of the stepchildren is Kathleen Hager Turman, wife of George Turman who was Missoula, Montana, mayor, a Montana state legislator, and a Montana public service commissioner. In 1980, he was the Democrat's nominee for Montana lieutenant governor.

<sup>43</sup>February 24, 1980.

cash in advance. But Holmes failed to demand advance payment for future issues.

A note Holmes from Mahlum dated only "Saturday" states: "Things are slow in getting straightened around and I guess you will have to take over. I hate to have to do this but I can't see any [other] way."

The bill of sale and surrender-of-possession document dated August 2, 1941, was signed by W. N. Mahlum and J. Defrees Holmes. Holmes owned two weeklies.

He hired Bob Bray's brother, Donald, to go to West Yellowstone each week for the rest of the summer to gather news and sell ads.

With the end of the tourist season came the end of the West Yellowstonian. In its final issue, it promised to return the next summer. But by that time Holmes had closed his Big Timber print shop and enlisted.

In a front-page column called "The Editor's Uneasy Chair," Bray wrote in the final issue:

With this, the tenth issue to "roll off the press," the West Yellowstonian bids its many friends and supporters goodbye for the winter months. Although the all-too-brief career of this little weekly has been the cause of a lot of ups and down, not to mention a few heartaches for a lot of readers, we feel now that its last month represents a very definite apology for the actions of the original publisher.

Several loyal friends of this paper have endeavored to keep it coming during the winter months, but after long and careful consideration, it has been decided to suspend publication until early next summer, since it is impossible to see where enough support could be obtained to publish continuously throughout the year . . .

Your editor, Donald Bray<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>West Yellowstone (Mont.) West Yellowstonian, August 30, 1941, p. 1.

Meanwhile, Holmes and Williams were carrying on verbal warfare in their Big Timber newspapers. Holmes called Williams a "liar" on several occasions and ran a front-page story alleging Williams was overcharging the county for printing.<sup>45</sup> Williams labeled Holmes' column "fool talk" and suggested he change the name from "Talk Of The Town" to "Talk of A Smart Aleck."<sup>46</sup>

When Holmes called Williams, then in his 60s or 70s, "senile," the Pioneer editor responded by bragging about his memory:

And now senility, particularly stressed by the News as applied to the editor of the Pioneer. . . .

For 51 years, either on the Livingston Enterprise or Big Timber Pioneer, this writer has never carried a notebook. . . . He wrote murder trials for the Enterprise. . . . He still goes on the streets of Big Timber, talks with residents of the county about . . . then goes to the office and runs it off on the typewriter, minus notes.

In the meantime, the News editor circulates with a notebook as large as a pad of toilet paper.<sup>47</sup>

In reflecting on the verbal exchanges, Holmes said:

It was only natural that I would have an editorial battle with a man who made no secret of his disdain for taking notes or documenting news events. I can remember even then thinking that I wouldn't trust his facts.<sup>48</sup>

The lead story in the October 30, 1940, News reported the lottery drawing to determine the order in

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<sup>45</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, February 11, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Pioneer, April 17, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Pioneer, March 20, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup>February 29, 1980.

which men of draft age would be called into the armed services. Holmes ranked 255th among the 429 men to be drafted from Sweet Grass County.<sup>49</sup>

The county draft board made deferments, attempting to minimize economic hardships. "My name was called and I got a number of deferments because no one could be hired to run the newspaper."<sup>50</sup>

His deferments infuriated Williams, who was anxious to be rid of his competition. Williams labeled him "J. Deferred Holmes."

Holmes countered by referring to Williams as "Colonel" and an "Armchair Patriot." "Colonel" referred to the fact Governor Roy Ayers had named Williams one of 280 honorary colonels in the state. Holmes described him as "Colonel Williams, commander of a regiment which doesn't exist. . . ."<sup>51</sup> The title "Armchair Patriot" came about when "J. Deferred" discovered Williams was of age to enlist but did not during the Spanish-American War.

Williams' response to being accused of being an "Armchair Patriot":

But the "armchair patriot." That came near to sending this editor [who had been sick] back home for another ten weeks. At first he could hardly breathe under the load. Everytime he went on the

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<sup>49</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, November 6, 1940, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup>February 20, 1980.

<sup>51</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, March 12, 1941, p. 4.

street he thought he could hear the people say "there goes the armchair patriot." Whenever someone looked in a window he believed they were doing it to let him pass before they were forced to look at "the armchair patriot." Then he worried that from an "armchair" he might pass to a wheel chair. Then he took a brace. By golly, if that happened he would still have the reputation of having far more from the collar up than his newspaper opponent has.<sup>52</sup>

Editorial battling and competition ended May 6, 1942, when the News ceased publication and Holmes went into the military. In a front-page box containing the headline "News Suspends Publication," he said goodbye to his readers:

It is with a great deal of sorrow that we announce at this time that the Sweet Grass News must suspend publication with this issue.

After eighteen full and continuous years of service to the community, it is hard to be forced to the decision to discontinue a newspaper that has become a community institution and so much a part of us; but today many of us are making immense sacrifices to win the war--and this particular one is the sacrifice the News must make. . . .

And so, we extend to all our friends and patrons of the past 18 years our best wishes against the hardships and hurdles of the immediate future ahead of us all--and it is our fond hope that we may find ourselves once more with you when Hitler and Hirohito breathe their last.

THE SWEET GRASS NEWS  
J. Defrees Holmes, editor<sup>53</sup>

He went to Lake Bluff, Illinois, to visit his parents. While there, he joined the Army Air Corps because by volunteering he had a better chance of being placed in communications.

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<sup>52</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Pioneer, April 17, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, May 6, 1942, p. 1. Hirohito, of course, did not breathe his last when World War II ended. In May 1980, with the death of Yugoslav President Tito, he became the last remaining major national leader in World War II.

## CHAPTER IV

On June 24, 1942, Private Joseph Defrees Holmes, 16097601, United States Army Air Corps, was sworn in and sent to Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois, for processing.

After the recruits shed their civilian hair styles and attire, Holmes did not recognize acquaintances he had made on the train. "I realized I had been identifying people by the clothes they wore. That's my earliest memory of the military."<sup>1</sup>

Holmes left three days later to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, which he said Walter Winchell called the "Hell Hole of the Air Corps" and where he "had a rough time adjusting to doing everything like a robot."<sup>2</sup>

After basic training at Jefferson Barracks, Holmes was sent in late July to radio school in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, for a crash course to become certified as a radio operator and mechanic. His knowledge of Morse Code and his typing ability helped him finish third in a class of 516 at the Army Air Forces Technical School.

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with J. D. Holmes, Helena, Montana, March 3, 1980. Subsequent footnotes for interviews with Holmes give the dates only.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

During the technical training:

Officers used to bring dignitaries through to watch me take code. I could take it at thirty-five words a minute typing with one finger. They would pretend radio school had taught me to do this. It amazed everyone but used to embarrass me.<sup>3</sup>

Holmes completed technical training December 3, 1942, was classified as a high speed code operator and was assigned to Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama, for three months. There he was elevated to corporal on January 1, 1943. Soon after he was transferred to Barksdale Field in Shreveport, Louisiana. There he was given a tropical overseas duty physical examination.

On a flight from Miami to Natal, Brazil, March 22, 1943, Holmes encountered his lone experience with enemy fire. His transport plane was jolted by German submarine shells off the east coast of South America, but no one was injured.

As the plane circled Natal,<sup>4</sup> Holmes saw "miles of attack bombers. I don't believe I have ever seen so many planes--before or since--all lined up on an airfield."<sup>5</sup>

After six weeks in Natal as a code operator, Holmes was stationed at Atkinson Field, twenty-five miles up the Demarara River from Georgetown, British South America.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>October 5, 1979.

<sup>4</sup>Natal was a stopover for aircraft, supplies, and soldiers. From there, they were flown to Ascension Island and through Africa to Europe.

<sup>5</sup>March 3, 1980.

<sup>6</sup>In 1980, Guyana.



He was to spend from May 12, 1943 until August 9, 1945 there as a code operator, sending and receiving messages for aircraft, ships, and ground installations. In October 1943, he was made a sergeant.

During off-duty hours, Holmes and others stationed at Atkinson Field would play chess or take the boat to Georgetown where they made friends with the residents and frequented the bars.

On a wall in his office hangs the front page of a Georgetown newspaper with a story about his chess playing:

Sergt. Holmes of the United States Army Air Corps . . . on Saturday night beat Mr. D. B. Robinson, 1945 B. G. champion, in a friendly tournament between the B. G. Chess Club and the U.S. Base Command.<sup>7</sup>

In a rematch three weeks later:

Sergt. Holmes of the Air Corps who won much approbation from his mates when he scored a win over the B. G. champion on June 23, had another crack at Mr. D. B. Robinson. On this occasion his luck ran out and he lost two games after a grim tussle.<sup>8</sup>

In August 1945, he was sent to Hato Field on the Dutch Island of Curacao off the coast of Venezuela. Holmes spent fewer than two months there before being sent back to the United States.

He arrived on leave in Big Timber September 27, 1945, his overseas duty and all but the formalities of

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<sup>7</sup>Georgetown (British South America) Daily Chronicle, June 25, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup>Georgetown (British South America) Daily Chronicle, July 16, 1945, p. 1.

discharge from the military completed. Almost immediately, he and Bert Baun began making wedding plans.

Bert telegraphed her sister Fran Hager who had offered her home in Missoula for the wedding and on October 2 received a telegram: "VERY GLAD YOU DECIDED TO COME LET ME KNOW WHAT TIME YOU ARRIVE WHAT PLANS ABOUT FLOWERS ARE THE FOLKS COMING."

October 4--seven days after Holmes arrived in Big Timber--the couple left for Missoula in his 1937 Ford to be married.

The wedding took place at 7:30 p.m., Sunday, October 7, 1945, in the John Hager home at 302 East Beckwith. The Reverend Guy L. Barnes, pastor of the University Congregational Church, conducted the ceremony, attended by the Hagers and their four children, Bert's sister, Maybelle Baun, and Bert's mother, Mrs. Emelia Baun. John Hager and Maybelle Baun were attendants.

To announce the marriage to friends and relatives, Holmes set on his Linotype a twenty-inch account of the wedding and honeymoon trip. He then duplicated it on the proof press. The account began: "We've been so occupied getting ready to be married, getting married and taking a fourteen hundred mile trip in our 1937 Ford coupe, that we have neglected our letter writing shamefully--but pardonably, we hope."

His military leave exhausted, Sergeant Holmes reported to Sheppard Field in Texas where on November 4, 1945,

he was honorably discharged. He had three good conduct medals and several commendations for his work as a code operator.

The couple went to Illinois to visit his parents and after their return to Big Timber, Holmes placed what he describes as a "have Linotype, will travel"<sup>9</sup> advertisement in the Western Newspaper Union's Publishers' Auxiliary.

On January 23, 1946, Holmes received from George Bennett the telegram: "PLEASE TELEPHONE LEWISTOWN 518 TONIGHT OR TOMORROW REGARDING YOUR ADD AUXILLARY [sic]."

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<sup>9</sup>March 3, 1980.

## CHAPTER V

George and Russell Bennitt needed someone to operate one of their weeklies and Holmes needed a job. As a result Holmes became editor of the Fergus County Argus, publishing his first issue February 7, 1946.

The Argus, which Holmes touted as being six years older than the state of Montana, had its own print shop separate from the Bennitts' daily Democrat News and weekly Judith Basin Farmer. Holmes was given a free rein to operate the Argus except for editorials.

He hired his new bride, Bert, as bookkeeper and used the columns he had run in both the Sheridan and Big Timber weeklies: "Hometown Notes and Folks" and "Talk of the Town." He described the layout of the Argus as a replica of the makeup he used in Big Timber.

Russell Bennitt liked to write editorials and gave them to Holmes for the Argus. That he and the Bennitts were Republicans did not mean they agreed on editorials. "I quickly became dissatisfied with the situation where they would bring in an editorial and I would have to run it."<sup>1</sup> He particularly did not like having to defend and

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with J. D. Holmes, Helena, Montana, March 3, 1980. Subsequent footnotes for interviews with Holmes give the date only.

discuss Bennitt's editorials. Holmes said he was placed in an awkward position because people did not know the Bennitts owned the paper and he did not like to tell people he did not agree with the editorials and that they were not his.

At the same time, he and his wife both liked living in Lewistown and were not ready to move. So, he suggested to the Bennitts that they combine the Argus and Farmer, both of which were breaking even but not making much money, and make him managing editor of their daily to replace Tom Stout<sup>2</sup> who was leaving to write editorials for the Billings Gazette.

The Bennitts liked the idea and Holmes' career in weekly newspapers ended September 12, 1946, slightly more than seven months after he went to work on the Argus.

Reflecting on his weekly newspaper years, Holmes called weeklies a good field but noted that editors now do not stay in weeklies long. "They go in and seem to become disillusioned. Maybe it's more work and less money than they expect."<sup>3</sup>

Holmes said the only part of publishing a weekly he disliked was operating the printing press but quickly added that he could do it when he had to.

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<sup>2</sup>Stout was elected to the State Senate 1910, 1912, 1930; State House 1942, 1944, 1946; U. S. House 1912, 1914; appointed Railroad Commissioner 1930, and is a member of the Montana Newspaper Hall of Fame.

<sup>3</sup>April 14, 1980.

Holmes liked the variety of work on a weekly and the contact with the public:

On a daily, you are more isolated. In the weekly business, you become a part of the community. People come in to renew subscriptions or bring in news items and you visit with them because you are working in the same room. On a daily or with the AP, you never see these people. You see only VIPs.<sup>4</sup>

After thirty years with the Associated Press searching for major stories and exclusives, Holmes remembers his days in the weekly business as the time when "I didn't really think of the 'big' story. I'd usually scoop myself on anything big by calling it into UP."<sup>5</sup>

Holmes' goal in publishing weeklies was "turning out an issue each week with as wide-spread interest as possible."<sup>6</sup>

To achieve this, he published short news stories. "I kept the items short so I could pack as many in as possible. I never had big blockbusters that went on for columns."<sup>7</sup>

In all three weeklies, news about the high schools was given prominent play on the front page. "When you wrote about the kids, you covered a wide area of the county."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

He printed "as a Christmas gesture from us to you . . ."<sup>9</sup>  
the Big Timber high school newspaper as an insert in the  
Sweet Grass News in 1939.

"Hometown Notes and Folks," his column of short  
items about social happenings, frequently occupied an entire  
page in his weeklies. "I worked on the theory that people  
wanted to see their names in the paper."<sup>10</sup>

About his news judgment, Holmes said:

I don't believe I ever consciously let advertisers  
or subscribers make any difference in news coverage  
just because I feared losing business. And, I don't  
remember ever editorializing for any advertiser.<sup>11</sup>

He said people often cancel subscriptions or quit  
advertising because they do not like what is printed, but  
as an editor "you can't let that bother you."<sup>12</sup>

In Sheridan, advertisers did cancel:

We lost some business in Sheridan with the anti-  
gambling, anti-prostitution campaign. Of course,  
the houses [of prostitution] didn't advertise, but  
the bars did and some of them quit because of it.<sup>13</sup>

Holmes does not believe in totally ignoring the  
feelings of the readers:

At the same time, you don't go around trying  
to offend people. That would be just like opening

<sup>9</sup>Big Timber (Mont.) Sweet Grass News, December 20,  
1939, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>April 14, 1980.

<sup>11</sup>April 21, 1980

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

up a new restaurant and serving lousy food. If you do, you are not going to last very long in the restaurant business.<sup>14</sup>

Holmes had little time for investigative stories because he was "working like a dog getting the routine stuff."<sup>15</sup> He said much of the reporting in the anti-gambling, anti-prostitution campaign in Sheridan was done in the course of routine work. He picked up information on his courthouse beat and Archie Nash, the publisher, did the same as he sold advertising.

In Big Timber, Holmes often had to go down the street to collect from advertisers (sometimes in advance) to pay his printer's salary, the bank note for print shop equipment, or his hotel room rent. "As long as I could pay the bills and keep going, I was happy."<sup>16</sup>

As managing editor of the daily Democrat News, Holmes edited news stories, wrote headlines, laid out pages, wrote editorials, and marked copy to be set aside for the weekly Argus-Farmer.

He had one and often two reporters working for him and as a result only wrote news stories occasionally. One of the reporters was Lyle Downing<sup>17</sup> who had worked for the

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Downing died October 14, 1979 at the age of seventy-seven. Holmes was a pallbearer at the funeral.



Great Falls Leader and later was the Helena Independent Record's capitol reporter and the first Montana chief of Aging Services.

Holmes recalled that the Democrat News proofreader, Walt Ogle, always questioned word usage and spelling. "He was a real stickler and I was happy to have him."<sup>18</sup>

Holmes again was a stringer for a news service, but in Lewistown it was the Associated Press. The switch from United Press came about because the Democrat News was an Associated Press member.

When the Bennitts sold the Democrat News seven months after Holmes became managing editor, Holmes sent the story to the Associated Press:

LEWISTOWN, April 16-(AP)-Sale of Lewistown's two newspapers--the Democrat-News, daily, and the Argus-Farmer, weekly, to Ken Byerly, 38-year-old Wyoming publisher, was announced today by George and Russell Bennitt, publishers of the papers since September, 1945.

The sale is effective May 1 [1947] . . . .<sup>19</sup>

Byerly made two changes in the Democrat-News. He wanted to write the editorial so Holmes--who did not like editorial writing--had one less duty, and November 1, 1947, Byerly changed the name of the newspaper to the Daily News.

While Holmes seldom wrote news stories for the Lewistown daily, he did cover two major stories there about subjects that were to resurface throughout his Associated

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>AP printout from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

Press career in Helena. The first story carried statewide was about the Montana School Foundation Program. He also covered the Joyland nightclub raid that led to banning slot machines from Montana.

Montana's complicated School Foundation Program for equalizing school funding was written by a committee chaired by C. G. Manning, Lewistown superintendent of schools. The committee changed the basis for state payments to school districts from the number of classrooms to the number of students and provided for greater state and county payments to financially poorer districts.

Up to 1949 [school] districts received aid from the state public school general fund on the basis of classroom units; that is, each district received the same amount per teacher, regardless of the valuation, and regardless of the need of the district.

In 1949, the Montana Legislative Assembly enacted legislation which provided for equalization by the county and state on a minimum foundation program for each district according to its needs. It provided for a county equalization fund to equalize basic needs among districts and for a state equalization fund to equalize basic needs among rich and poor counties. The basis for this minimum foundation program was a schedule set up by law, which provided for the size of the foundation program according to the number of pupils involved. The number of pupils is figured by the average number belonging (ANB). This average number belonging is found by taking the total days of attendance of all pupils in the district for the previous year plus the total days of absence and dividing by 180. (After a pupil has been absent for three days he is dropped and the days lost between that day and the day he re-enters is not counted in either total attendance or total absence.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Mary M. Condon (State Superintendent of Public Instruction), Public School Financing in Montana, Finance and Legislative Bulletin, July 1, 1954, pp. 1-2.

When the committee had completed its work for presentation to the 1949 legislature, Manning gave the story to Holmes to "break" statewide. And the following January when that legislative session convened, Holmes was there, covering the passage of the bill in the Senate.

John Kuglin,<sup>21</sup> a fellow Capitol reporter, describes Holmes as "the only reporter who ever really understood the School Foundation Program."<sup>22</sup>

Holmes, however, said he always was frustrated when he had to explain the foundation program. "You had to really simplify it if you expected people to read it. Otherwise you'd lose everybody in the first paragraph."<sup>23</sup>

His other major story in Lewistown came about after the young female county attorney issued an opinion on the legality of slot machines.

O. Louise Replogle issued the opinion late in the summer of 1947, stating that slot machines were a form of lottery and thus illegal though the state was licensing them to nonprofit organizations.

All Fergus County bars, which were operating under the guise of being nonprofit, and the nonprofit clubs--except the Joyland Club--removed their slot machines.

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<sup>21</sup>Kuglin has worked for the Independent Record and the Great Falls Tribune. In 1980 he was AP news editor in Helena.

<sup>22</sup>Telephone interview with John Kuglin, Helena, Montana, April 17, 1980.

<sup>23</sup>April 17, 1980.

"At Joyland, they didn't think I was serious,"<sup>24</sup>  
Louise Replogle Rankin Galt said.

So, on the night of September 13, 1947, Replogle, the deputy sheriff, the assistant police chief, and Holmes-- who Replogle had notified--marched into the Joyland Club outside the Lewistown city limits to confiscate the slot machines.

Holmes recalled the incident:

It was a famous raid. I'm tailing along behind. They tried to collect a cover charge from me and I said: "I'm along on the raid." The doorkeeper [who had let the others in free] didn't know there was a raid going on.<sup>25</sup>

Replogle had not notified Fergus County Sheriff Chris Christensen of her intent to confiscate the machines because she did not trust him. Inside she found two licensed slot machines, three unlicensed machines that had been installed two days before, and the sheriff.

"I said, 'Come on, Chris, help us carry these [slot machines] out.' And, he did,"<sup>26</sup> Galt recalled.

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<sup>24</sup>Telephone interview with Louise Replogle Rankin Galt, Helena, Montana, March 4, 1980. She married Wellington Rankin, a well-known Helena lawyer and Montana landowner. He died June 9, 1966 at the age of eighty-one. Both Rankin and her second husband, Jack Galt, Martinsdale, Montana, rancher and state senator, were elected Republican National Committeemen. She was appointed to the State Board of Education January 31, 1971. In 1980, she was practicing law in Helena where she also was Lewis and Clark County Republican Chairman.

<sup>25</sup>October 5, 1979.

<sup>26</sup>Telephone interview with Louise Replogle Rankin Galt, Helena, Montana, March 4, 1980.

The story Holmes wrote did not, however, mention that the sheriff was found playing the illegal gaming device:

On the heels of her warning to gamblers in the so-called non-profit social clubs, Fergus County Attorney O. Louise Replogle Saturday night raided the Joyland club northwest of the city, confiscating five slot machines and arresting two of the club's directors.

Directors arrested were W. S. Shepherd, president, and Ann LaMere, secretary. Both were charged with violating the lottery law and the gambling law.

A third warrant, which was not served, has been issued for the arrest of Andrew Medvec of Great Falls, club vice president.

Heading the raiding party was Miss Replogle, the Treasure state's only woman prosecutor. She was assisted by Sheriff Chris Christensen, Chief of Police A. C. McKnight, Deputy Sheriff Fred Bucher, and Assistant Chief of Police William Goodrich.

The county attorney said that Weymouth D. Symmes and James E. McKenna, local attorneys, have been named as special counsel to assist in the prosecution of the case.

Confiscated during the surprise raid, which was skillfully planned and smoothly executed, were five slot machines--two five-cent machines, two quarter machines, and a dime machine . . . .<sup>27</sup>

Holmes said that reporting the sheriff being in the Joyland would have been "pretty heavy stuff at the time." He recalls "Byerly [his publisher] edited it after I wrote it. But I can't remember what, if anything, he took out."<sup>28</sup>

After District Judge C. F. Holt ruled slot machines were illegal, the case was appealed to the Montana Supreme Court which on June 30, 1950, upheld the district court decision.

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<sup>27</sup> Lewistown (Mont.) Democrat-News, September 14, 1947, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> April 17, 1980.

Holmes said that during his Associated Press career he frequently wrote about the Joyland case because the Montana Supreme Court referred to it as a precedent.

For Holmes, "gambling was just a story to cover."<sup>29</sup> He said he played slot machines in Big Timber, but he can gamble or leave it alone and never has had any strong feelings about it.

He said he never was threatened by pro-gambling interests, but remembers Archie Nash, publisher in Sheridan, telling him about receiving veiled threats during the anti-gambling campaign there.

In July 1948, Bert Holmes decided to quit her job at Northwestern Bank--where she went to work after the Argus-Farmer merger left her unemployed--to start a family. Holmes recalled that about two weeks later he also decided to quit.

The couple went to Chicago to visit his parents, then set out for California. Traveling through Montana on their way, they stopped to visit the Hagers who had returned to Big Timber. During the visit, John Hager went to Missoula on a business trip and Holmes decided to go along. When the two stopped for lunch in Helena, Holmes telephoned John Kamps, Associated Press Montana correspondent.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

Kamps told Holmes he had a job opening in Helena. If Holmes wanted the position, Kamps would recommend him to Denver bureau chief Lewis Hawkins, who did the hiring for the Montana Associated Press.

With recommendations from Kamps and Byerly, Holmes was hired. Byerly's recommendation letter:

It is our understanding that J. D. Holmes has applied for a position with your organization.

He served as our editor under me for fourteen months, and considerably longer than that before I purchased the Lewistown Daily News. He has a full and very sound background in all phases of newspaper work, which has been based on many years of practical experience.

If you employ him, I also feel sure that you need have no fear of having information and other items of danger get on the wire, as he is thoroughly aware of these problems and always protected us one hundred percent while working with the Daily News.

He is a "work horse," and is loyal, dependable, and accurate. . . .<sup>30</sup>

On October 3, 1948, Holmes began his thirty-year career with the Associated Press. His starting salary was \$90.25 a week including a cost-of-living adjustment, because it was more expensive to live in Montana, and a \$1 differential for each night shift.

Holmes received a letter of instructions from Hawkins:

Now that the formalities seem pretty well disposed of, this is a note of welcome to the AP staff.

You'll find a lot of principles the same as those you followed in daily newspapering--and you'll find some different ones, too. Or perhaps I should say

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<sup>30</sup>Ken Byerly recommendation letter to AP, September 21, 1948, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

one very important one that is different from almost all the newspapers I know anything of.

This is the matter of neutrality and objectivity on all subjects. I know that you realize this, in the abstract, at least, and that John Kamps will have impressed it on you, too, but I'd like to put it right in the record. It's a fetish with us--and it's dawgone important from a practical standpoint, as well. Our reputation in that direction is an enviable one and we've earned it by a single-minded devotion to the basic principle. It's our one and only master and we can serve no other.

Working with John Kamps, you have an opportunity to learn our ways under one of the best correspondents we have and I'm sure you'll profit by it.

Lest you be a bit confused by our organizational lines, I'd like to clarify them. John is your No. 1 boss and, for the most part, the only one you need be concerned about. My role is a supervisory one and, in the main, I lean very heavily on John's judgment in evaluating the staff under him although I do try to become well acquainted with everyone in my area and to observe each man's work as carefully as I can.

If, at any time, you feel that you're not getting a square deal--and I have not the slightest reason to believe you ever will--you are perfectly at liberty to carry your troubles to me, or to L. H. Thomason of the general office personnel department or to Kent Cooper [AP General Manager] himself if you wish. This is a devil of a bit outfit but it still is a human one and we hope you'll remember that.

The best of luck to you.<sup>31</sup>

Holmes and his pregnant wife stayed in the Placer Hotel, then the center of political activity, for a week before they found an apartment, a duplex four miles out in the Helena Valley on North Montana Avenue.

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<sup>31</sup> Lewis Hawkins letter to J. D. Holmes, October 6, 1948, from Holmes library. April 1980, AP alumni newsletter Cleartime reported that in 1945 Hawkins was involved in the controversial release by AP's Edward Kennedy of Germany's surrender in World War II. Kennedy defied an official embargo and bypassed regular channels of censorship, using an unauthorized phone to call London. In the London bureau, Hawkins recognized his voice confirming it was not a hoax and penciled the flash for dispatch to the U.S.



He started on the night shift. Three other newsmen were working in Helena for the Associated Press then: John Kamps, the correspondent; Merrill "Brit" Englund, and Ed Johnson.

"Writing was the least of it. The mechanics were what was hard,"<sup>32</sup> Holmes said of making the transition from daily newspapers to the Associated Press.

He had to learn how to punch stories on a teletype machine. With the small Montana staff, the teletype operators did not work nights or weekends. Remembering that it was hard to stay ahead of the teletype transmitting the yellow tape with holes punched in it, he said newsmen liked to get two or three stories punched ahead of the split time when Helena would send the state news to its members.

If you got behind, an arm would go up and down between the teletype and sender, making a clickety-clack sound which made you nervous as hell. Meanwhile, you were hoping the damn phone wouldn't ring.<sup>33</sup>

Noting that very few Associated Press news personnel now know how to operate a tape-punching system, he recalled that he could read the letters represented by the holes punched in the tape. Operators would turn to another machine, punch out the correct letter, tear the tape, and insert the correct letter before the error was sent.

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<sup>32</sup>April 30, 1980.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

Associated Press newsmen also could rely on editors to catch errors before they were set in type:

In the old days, desk men did a better job. The copy was in all caps and editors had to read the copy more closely. It made them a hell of a lot better editors than those now.<sup>34</sup>

Holmes has kept a note of instructions given him by Kamps about the "nightside" routine which included everything from covering the Capitol to picking up the mail:

First, check the day's state file, reading every story. Then check the message file for the day. This will bring the night man up to date on everything the day side has done and give him an idea of what stories or requests will have to be handled on the night shift.

After that, head for the state house and check every office you can before 5 pms. [5 p.m. mountain standard time] It's a good idea to check the datebook, also, before going to the Capitol, for sometimes tips on yarns out there are listed in the book.

The night man's immediate concern upon returning from the Capitol is to prepare whatever stuff he gets out there and read the copy left by the day man. Arrange the night file in the order of its importance and prepare a schedule for the 6 pms split. Always move sports as soon as possible after the split starts, because sports pages usually have earlier deadlines than news pages--especially small papers.

One thing to remember here: never keep the wire beyond 645 pms on the first evening split unless you ask permission from DX [Denver]. Occasionally you may want to hold longer than 645 pms if you are leaded with prime copy, if a line point takes up too much time, or if DX starts the split late. When asking DX for the extension, always explain your reason.

Another good habit to get into here: Always write out your split schedule message to DX so you'll remember to do it when you are working with a puncher. It's against the union rules for a puncher to put anything on the wire he doesn't receive from an editor.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

Things to do before the second split starts at 8 pms: Get the Mont-Wyo. forecast before 7 pms. Get the wea [weather] table around 730 pms. (Both should move first on the 8 pms split because of BI's [Billings] early deadline.) Go to the postoffice. Prepare everything that develops for the 8 pms split, including anything you might get at the postoffice, telegrams, etc.

If things are dull, it's a good idea to get started on the PMs rewrites and clean them up as soon as possible so you won't find 1 ams rolling around with several stories still undone for the dayside.

Always keep in mind that stories of a general nature should be scheduled to DX as soon as possible. If it's a prime state yarn, of no interest outside Montana, but one you think can't wait until the next split try and get it on this way:

"DX

Have 250 [word] Montana politix which would apc [appreciate] moving soon possible for early edns [editions]. Can we have special split, pls [please]? Tnx.

HL"

Usually DX will let you send it immediately.

Use the 1030 pms split to clean up any nite stuff you have. If anything develops after that, just sked it to DX and they'll let you go general.

Make sure the radio desk gets any copy you write after 11 pms clearly marked whether it is new or rewrite.

After you have cleaned up the rewrites, PMs handouts, clips, etc., try to bring the stringer credits up to date and acquaint yourself with the earthquake file, "EOS" file, morgue, etc.

Turn off all equipment except one radio printer after 1 ams.

Before leaving at 1 ams, leave the day man a note on anything you didn't have time to rewrite and list any stories that will have to be developed by the dayside.

Seven months after Holmes went to work for the Associated Press, he became a father. He took Bert to St. John's Hospital at 11 a.m. May 8, 1948. After the hospital staff served her a full-course ham dinner at noon, she began vomiting with each contraction. At that point,

she suggested he go home--which he promptly did. After Vicki was born later that afternoon, Holmes and his neighbor, Curt Stenhjem, celebrated at the Red Meadow Bar near the hospital and sent Bert a telegram.

Before their second daughter was born, Holmes decided he wanted no part of the process and hired a nurse to stay with his wife while she was in the labor room. Nancy arrived at 5 a.m. March 26, 1953, but Holmes did not go to the hospital to visit his wife or new daughter until 8:30 p.m.

He took Vicki to the neighbor for the day and went to work at 5:30 a.m. When his shift ended at 3:30 p.m., he picked up Vicki and took her out for a hamburger. While they were eating, he noticed she could not lift her glass of milk. He took her to Dr. Belle Richards, who discovered Vicki had a broken collarbone and sent Holmes to St. John's to admit his daughter. Instead of visiting his wife and new daughter, he went to tell the neighbor about the broken collarbone. Because the accident had happened at the neighbor's, she burst into tears and Holmes had to console her. When he returned to the hospital, he had one less-than-happy wife to deal with.

Both Holmes and his wife now chuckle when they talk about a Helena daily newspaper publishing a short story about three-fourths of the Holmes family being hospitalized.

David was born August 2, 1955, without any of the

excitement that surrounded the arrival of the daughters. In fact, Bert says he was born between tour train shifts. She was going into the hospital when the Last Chancer tour train went by on its way up to the old water tower at about 1 p.m. and was out of delivery and in her room when it went by about 4 p.m. on its second trip of the afternoon.<sup>35</sup>

The Holmeses lived in their Helena Valley apartment for about two-and-one-half years before buying their first home in 1951 at 1012 9th Avenue.

While they were living on 9th Avenue, Norma Ashby, producers of the Montana Television Network's "Today in Montana," was growing up next door. When Holmes retired in 1978, she wrote:

I'm . . . sure you remember the little 10-year-old girl who once lived next door to you on 9th Avenue who you inspired way back then to go into a career in journalism. It's true J. D. I really consider you the first person who sparked an interest in me in going into journalism. I was always so impressed watching you go off to work in your trench coat and slouth [slouch] hat!<sup>36</sup>

Holmes recalled when James Tomlinson--now Associated Press vice president, secretary, and treasurer and who started his career with the news service in Helena in 1951--left Helena, his last stop was at the Holmes' home on

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<sup>35</sup>Interview with Bert Holmes, Helena, Montana, April 30, 1980.

<sup>36</sup>Norma Ashby letter to J. D. Holmes, October 17, 1978, from Holmes library.

9th Avenue. Tomlinson took a cab to the airport from there and has not been in Helena since.

When Holmes retired, Tomlinson wrote:

I want to take this occasion to express to you warmest thanks for all the help you gave me when I first walked into the Helena Bureau and the AP 27 years ago as the greenest kind of greenhorn.

You showed me how to punch a basketball boxscore, assemble a 6:30 a.m. radio split, deal with a farm-wife stringer giving us a lightening-hits-a-haystack fire near Broadus, fight off a spruce budworm moth invasion of the bureau in the summer, and turn away old prospectors who stumbled up the stairs in search of the ladies who used to loll about the bureau before it was a bureau.<sup>37</sup>

With their family expanding, the Holmeses moved into their present home at 512 North Rodney in June 1954. They added two bedrooms and a recreation room, and extensively remodeled the home to provide an office for Holmes and play space for the children.

While the recreation room in the basement was built for the children, it later was the site of many poker parties and the Holmes' cocktail parties when they entertained reporters, editors, lobbyists, elected officials, and public relations people.

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<sup>37</sup>James F. Tomlinson letter to J. D. Holmes, September 12, 1978, from Holmes library.

## CHAPTER VI

Whoso tells the truth dully, he treats a noble friend most shabbily; for truly the truth deserves cloth of Brabant and cloak of ermine. Yet is the dullest truth better than the cleverest insincerity.

Holmes says the above, often quoted by Arthur L. Stone, first dean of the University of Montana School of Journalism, is one of his favorites.

For thirty years, he sought out interesting truths to report objectively to Montana newspaper readers, radio listeners, and television viewers.

Holmes was a magician with fiscal matters, particularly in the Montana House of Representatives. For many legislative sessions, he knew more about the state's budget than the legislators themselves.

"I was really keeping the books for the appropriations committee. I kept them for news purposes and they [committee members] used them."<sup>1</sup>

After the 1963 session, Representative Francis Bardanouve, a Harlem Democrat who later served as chairman of the House Finance and Claims Committee, wrote to Holmes:

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with J. D. Holmes, Helena, Montana, May 5, 1980. Subsequent footnotes for interviews with Holmes give the date only.

I wish to commend you for the excellent coverage of the 1963 appropriations in today's [Great Falls] Tribune (Sunday March 24). It is the most complete and factual report I have seen.

In fact it has disturbed me considerably to come home and not know quiet [sic] what I appropriated.<sup>2</sup>

Holmes said in the late 1960s the House finance committee began keeping track of its appropriations, thus discontinuing use of his figures.

While Holmes did help legislators keep track of appropriations, a different attempt to help resulted in an accusation that he ran the House.

Holmes often would telephone his Associated Press colleague in the Senate to check the status of legislation. Then he would walk from the press table to whisper news of Senate action in the House Speaker's ear.

During a particularly hot battle, Holmes walked over to whisper to the Speaker numerous times. At the same time, the Speaker was making rulings that were irritating some legislators. A legislator rose to a point of personal privilege and accused the Speaker of taking his instructions from Holmes.

My timing was bad. I'd whisper something to the Speaker and he'd bang the gavel. The Speaker put the legislator in his place, and informed him I wasn't running the House, and resolved the incident, but I was redfaced over it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Francis Bardonou letter to J. D. Holmes, March 24, 1963, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

<sup>3</sup>May 8, 1980.



Later, Edna Hinman,<sup>4</sup> the House Chief Clerk, presented Holmes with a red- and white-ribboned gavel as a joke so that he had the tool to run the House properly. Holmes admitted relaying messages was not appropriate for a reporter.

While helping legislators enabled Holmes to get stories, so did the longevity of his assignment in the House. "The legislators knew me and would come to me with their bills. Other reporters came and went and the legislators never got to know them."<sup>5</sup>

Holmes covered sixteen regular sessions of the legislature, including the state's attempt at annual sessions in 1973-74, four special sessions that were actually extensions of regular sessions, and two summer special sessions. The final special session was prompted by a story he wrote.

From his first session in 1949 through 1965, no special sessions were called. Instead, when the legislators had not completed their business on time--and they never did during those nine sessions--they would simply stop the clock or cover it with a sheet of paper and record all business transacted after that as part of the sixtieth day.

In 1967, legislators ended the regular session on time for the first time since 1947, but then called a

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<sup>4</sup>Hinman, a Republican, was elected State Treasurer in 1954 and 1962.

<sup>5</sup>May 8, 1980.

special session that began the following day. It lasted for sixteen days. The 1969, 1971, and 1973 assemblies also called special sessions that were, in reality, extensions of the regular session.<sup>6</sup>

Holmes covered 106 days of the legislature in 1971. That year the legislature met in one regular and two special sessions as the Republicans who backed a sales tax and the Democrats supporting an income-tax increase could not resolve their differences. They met for twenty-seven days in a special session immediately after the regular session. It ended in deadlock April 3. The Republican-controlled House and Democrat-dominated Senate returned June 7 for a nineteen-day special session that resulted in agreement to put the sales tax issue on the ballot and raise income taxes if the voters did not approve the sales tax.

Holmes called the story he wrote that sparked the 1975 special session the biggest in his career. He discovered through a tip from a friend that the legislature had failed to appropriate the statewide six-mill levy for support of the University System. The story:

Without a special session of the legislature, Montana's University System could be in \$15 million worth of trouble.

The precarious fiscal situation stems from failure of the 1975 legislature assembly to give the usual authorization to levy up to six mills on the taxable value of all property in the state for support of the six-unit system.

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<sup>6</sup>J. D. Holmes Black Book, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

Lack of that customary university-millage revenue would short the state's already hard-pressed system of higher education by \$7.6 million a year.

For the biennium beginning on July 1, the shortage would amount to \$15.2 million.

At the latest, the situation--kept under wraps by officialdom until uncovered by the Associated Press on Wednesday [June 11, 1975]--must come to a head in August. That's when the Department of Revenue has to set any statewide levy so first-half payments can be collected in November.

Since 1949, Montana legislatures have dutifully followed the authorization of the voters, given every 10 years, to levy the millage. The first such mandate was given at the polls in 1948 and renewed in 1958 and 1968.

The latest mandate says the legislature "shall levy a property tax of not more than six mills on the taxable value of all real and personal property each year . . . for the support, maintenance, and improvement of the Montana University System."

That mandate is good for 10 years beginning in 1969.

The Senator who routinely used to introduce the bill that authorized the six-mill university levy for a biennium at a time was William A. Groff, now director of the state Revenue Department.

He presently is a man on the spot.

"We haven't arrived at a final conclusion," Groff said. "We are doing a lot of research. We are approaching the problem from the theory that the legislature did appropriate university-millage money and the action may constitute authorization to levy the tax."

"It looks like it might be very foolish to have a special session," Groff said.

He added, however, that if there should be a challenge in court of the department's right to levy the tax without the usual statutory authorization, a special session might have to be called.

"A court injunction could lead to a special session because we couldn't take a chance on the outcome," Groff said.

Groff recalled that a legislature once failed to pass the customary bill validating all bonds issued by public agencies. He said nothing happened, although legal action had been possible, and the oversight was rectified at the next session.

Senate Majority Leader Neil J. Lynch, D-Butte, when questioned by a newsman, said he was aware of the problem, but declared: "I see no reason for a special session."

He blamed the blunder, at least in part, on the Executive Reorganization Act of 1971 and the many transfers of functions that resulted over the following years.

Other officials questioned by the AP said they felt the blame must be shared.

Word of the problem came as a surprise to House Speaker Pat McKittrick, D-Great Falls. After a quick check of the statutes, McKittrick said: "At this time, I'm just seeing what the developments are and haven't definitely concluded one way or the other if a special session is needed."

He said another reason for a special session could develop if it is found that the U.S. government withholds federal highway funds from Montana. His concern stems from unsuccessful efforts in the 1975 session to stiffen Montana's penalty for exceeding the speed limit of 55 miles an hour.

John D. LaFaver, the legislature's fiscal analyst, said research by attorneys for both the legislative and executive branches indicates that public approval of university-millage makes it self-executing law.

He said the attorneys say the customary passage of university-mill-levy legislation was unnecessary. They say a key point is the fact that the law says the legislature "shall" levy the tax rather than "may."

"It's very clear to me that the legislature wanted the university units to have the \$15.2 million," LaFaver said.

As substantiation, he displayed the university appropriations bill which, for each unit, appropriates certain amounts from the university millage account.

The possible invalid millage amounts appropriated for the next biennium are about: \$6.1 million for the University of Montana, Missoula; \$5.9 million for Montana State University, Bozeman; \$1.6 million for Eastern Montana College, Billings; \$645,000 for Northern Montana College, Havre; \$433,500 for Montana Tech, Butte; and \$382,800 for Western Montana College, Dillon.

Six mills have been levied by statute in each year since 1969. For six years before that, the levies ranged from 5.5-5.75 mills. Each year from 1949 through 1962, the university system was at six mills.

One official said that if the legislators should be called into special session, either by the governor or by a majority of the 150 members, the needed legislation could be handled in two days.

"But they would probably take<sup>7</sup> a week and get into a lot of other things," he added.

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<sup>7</sup>Helena (Mont.) Independent Record, June 12, 1975, p. 20.

The state Supreme Court ruled a session had to be convened. It was called by Gov. Thomas L. Judge. The shortest in Montana history, it lasted ten hours and nineteen minutes, an hour and nineteen minutes shorter than the state's other single-day session, May 26, 1903.<sup>8</sup>

At the special session August 4, 1975, the legislators levied the six-mill property tax for the University System and approved legislation that "insures that new monies from sources other than the state's general fund [federal funds] may be spent if approved by the watchdog Legislative Finance Committee."<sup>9</sup>

Minimizing his influence, Holmes said had he not prompted the session, someone else probably would have brought the situation into the open.

The year 1975 was also one of two in which his January 21 birthday was observed by the House. House Speaker Pat McKittrick, a Great Falls Democrat, made the motion that the House stand and sing "Happy Birthday" to Holmes. The vote was 96-0 in favor.

In 1967, Majority Leader James Lucas, Miles City Republican, sent a page to bring Holmes from the press room to the House chamber to honor Holmes' birthday.

During one birthday celebration in the House,

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<sup>8</sup>J. D. Holmes Black Book.

<sup>9</sup>Helena (Mont.) Independent Record, August 6, 1975, p. 18.

Holmes received a bottle of whiskey. But he did not consider accepting the gift unethical:

It came from both sides of the aisle as part of a ceremony and was not a bribe. Besides, you can't turn down a gift in front of the entire house.<sup>10</sup>

#### Reporting the Legislature

"You had to play it by ear every day," Holmes said about covering the legislature. He was a reporter in the Senate for the first few sessions before moving to the House for the remainder of his career. He said the Associated Press assigned its junior legislative reporter to the Senate because there were half as many names to remember and the pace was not as hectic.

His Black Book, Legislative Black Book, and Legislative Clip books were invaluable to him during sessions.

"I had to provide the basic report. It enabled me to have the best factual account of what was going on in the session,"<sup>11</sup> Holmes said of his little-known second Black Book that he carried with him along with the Black Book during the legislature.

In it he daily glued the "Legislative Calendar"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>May 5, 1980.

<sup>11</sup>February 20, 1980.

<sup>12</sup>The Legislative Calendar contains a schedule of committee hearings and bills up for consideration that day as well as action taken on bills the previous day.

that he and the Associated Press reporter covering the Senate had compiled the night before for publication in the daily newspapers. He also transferred legislative statistics from his "basic" Black Book to have all legislative information in one volume during a session.

Holmes started using his Legislative Clip Books in 1959. Each morning he would clip all stories written about bills from the Great Falls Tribune and the Helena Independent Record and place them in his five- by seven-inch ringed clip book for background. With a marker pen, he wrote the the bill numbers on the stories. Thus, he had at his fingertips the hours of work other reporters had done researching bills.

Early in the session when bill introductions were the primary source of news stories, Holmes had a fairly set routine.

To find bills to write about, Holmes would go to the House Chief Clerk's office to ask about bill introductions, walk through the halls outside the chambers where the lobbyists hang out, or simply sit at the press table where legislators would bring him their pet bills.

In gathering information about the bills:

You'd read the title of the bill. If it was a story possibility, then you'd read the entire bill. But you'd rarely just read the bill and write the story. You'd have to have someone tell you what it means, particularly in relation to present law.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>May 8, 1980.

Holmes' next steps were to check with any state agency affected by the bill, the legislator(s) who introduced the bill or a lobbyist who had an interest in it.

State officials could tell him how proposed legislation would affect an agency or present law.

In the halls outside the House and Senate chambers:

A lobbyist would say: "hey, we're introducing a bill this morning," then he'd tell you about it. It was always helpful to you. If it wasn't important enough to be a separate story, it might be useful in a roundup story.<sup>14</sup>

He said many lobbyists stayed in the same place so they could be found by legislators and newsmen. He noted that Socs Vratiss, who lobbied for the Montana Retail Association from 1964-1977 and whom Holmes described as one of the better-known lobbyists, always sat at the end of one bench in the hallway on the north side of the Senate chambers near the lunch counter. "Vratiss would be about half mad if someone sat in 'his' place."<sup>15</sup>

Holmes said lobbyists never attempted to bribe or strongarm him about stories, "probably because they knew I was going to go my own way."<sup>16</sup>

When he was at the press table, legislators brought him bills. He said he spent most of his time at the press table in the House rather than in the Capitol's press room

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.



so that legislators could easily find him and he could see them if he needed background information.

Holmes said he never thought of either lobbyists or legislators as "lobbying" newsmen, but "just being helpful."<sup>17</sup> Obtaining copies of bills often took too much time through the House Chief Clerk's office. He was able to get them more quickly from legislators or lobbyists.

Time was important for an Associated Press newsmen who had to have radio stories on the wire by 9:30 or 10 a.m. and at least two newspaper stories written before noon for the evening newspapers.

Later in the day, Holmes had to turn out stories for the morning newspapers, more radio stories, and the Legislative Calendar. Working overtime was the norm. To help his wife, who had to keep the evening meal warm, he bought with overtime pay a television set for the kitchen.

Holmes said hearings were difficult for an Associated Press reporter to cover because they were time-consuming and a reporter had to sit through an entire hearing to get a good story. As a result, he left all but the major hearings to the Lee State Bureau and Tribune Capitol Bureau.

He selected his subjects based on "the atmosphere of the times"<sup>18</sup> and what might be interesting or important enough to make the front page.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

Holmes said routine Capitol coverage was not as thorough during the legislature. He would make what he described as a swift run around the Capitol or use the telephone from the House press table to gather news from other agencies. He would cover regular meetings of boards such as the Board of Examiners during a session if he thought they were more interesting or important than what might come from the House that day.

#### Holmes on Lobbyists

"I never met a lobbyist I didn't like and never saw them as evil,"<sup>19</sup> Holmes said.

He agrees with Vratis who in a Great Falls Tribune Capitol Bureau interview said:

. . . when you come to the special interest groups that lobby, the 150 ladies and gentlemen occupying those seats in the House and Senate constitute the state's biggest lobby force and most powerful.

They have a great advantage over the registered, paid lobbyist, in that they can lobby legislators during the session, on the floor, on their pet bills. And House members can go lobby Senate members on their pet bills that have passed the House and vice versa.<sup>20</sup>

Holmes often saw senators standing in the back of the House chamber<sup>21</sup> watching floor action or talking with

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune, April 29, 1978, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Male legislators are able to go directly from one chamber to the other through a restroom.

representatives. "You know darn well they were lobbying their bills,"<sup>22</sup> Holmes said.

For the first ten years Holmes covered the legislature, the Anaconda Company lobbyists both carried press credentials and poured drinks in the company's hospitality room in the evenings. He said they were certified as reporters from the Butte Montana Standard, the flagship of the Anaconda Company-owned daily newspapers. He remembers one in particular, Emmet Buckley, who sat at the press table keeping a record of actions to report to the company.

Holmes said other companies periodically sent "reporters" for their house organs to the legislature, and all lobbyists disappeared from the press table after Anaconda sold its newspapers to Lee Enterprises in 1959.

He found company people at the press table helpful because they always could give newsmen information not otherwise available.

He remembers the days of the corporate hospitality rooms maintained by the lobbyists:

The most famous--or infamous--watering holes were in the Placer Hotel for years. I used to remember the room numbers. They [lobbyists] tried to keep the same rooms session after session.

The watering holes were gathering places. Some legislators didn't do much drinking them. People came and went. The Placer's Cheerio Bar was also always crowded and so were the other bars on main street [Last Chance Gulch]. No one went out to places

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<sup>22</sup>May 8, 1980.

like Jorgensons or the Colonial on the edge of town.<sup>23</sup>

He said the hospitality rooms full of liquor and sandwich makings were useful to legislators and newsmen as well as the lobbyists.

Somewhere you needed relaxation. The drinks were free and newsmen didn't have much money in those days. And, they were the best places to talk to people.<sup>24</sup>

Holmes remembers watching more than once as a legislator who was eating the Anaconda Company's food and drinking its booze told the lobbyist he was going to vote against the company's bill.

I never felt vote selling was going on in the watering holes. If there was vote selling (and there may have been), it was done in a more serious way. It may happen that way [in watering holes] in books and movies, but I don't think it really works that way.<sup>25</sup>

Holmes did know a legislator who accepted a bribe, but he met the senator long after the incident. He was William J. Hannah, Sweet Grass County's first state senator and a Democrat who served in the 1897 and 1899 sessions.<sup>26</sup> Hannah, by then elderly, would come into the Sweet Grass News office in Big Timber to visit with Holmes.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ellis Waldron, An Atlas of Montana Politics Since 1864 (Missoula, Mont.: Montana State University Press, 1958), p. 409.

Holmes said Hannah accepted a \$10,000 bribe through a transom in his hotel room at the Placer. The names of those who accepted bribes came out publicly and Hannah was literally tarred and feathered and rode out of town on a rail when he returned to Big Timber after the session. He got off the train in Reed Point and returned to Big Timber where he spent the bribe money on an opera house for the people of Sweet Grass County. Holmes said the opera house was a popular gathering place in the early 1900s but had burned by the time he came to town.<sup>27</sup>

Holmes thinks the flavor of the Legislature disappeared when the watering holes dried up. They ended in the late 1960s because of increasing public pressure. Now, he said, reporters no longer have access to informal discussions among legislators who are tossing around ideas, the day's events, and behind-the-scenes information.

Holmes believes the better-healed lobbyists still have motel suites where they entertain. As he talked about the change in the lobbyists' methods of entertaining, Holmes pointed to a 1973 story by Lee Newspapers Bureau Chief Gary Langley:<sup>28</sup>

Brushing against the state capitol's corps of lobbyists for the first time, freshmen legislators are receiving piles of invitations to dinners and cocktail parties.

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<sup>27</sup>February 24, 1980.

<sup>28</sup>Langley covered four regular and two special legislative sessions from 1973 to 1977.

The affairs are avoided by some while others, who have received as many as a half a dozen invitations a week, attend as many as they can. . . .

The get-togethers range from elaborate dinners and formal cocktail parties to spur-of-the-moment invitations to lunch and apparently are organized primarily by the large industrial lobbyists.<sup>29</sup>

In summarizing the influence of lobbying groups during the thirty years he covered legislative sessions, Holmes said:

Labor always has had a strong lobby. So much of the time when I think of labor, I think of just one person--Jim Murry [AFL-CIO].

The environmentalists started gradually and took over completely for awhile. When they get the bulk of what they want, their influence will decrease.

The corporate influence always was, always will be. Corporate [influence] was the strongest until the Anaconda Company waned. They [Anaconda] were only interested in their own bills and could have cared less about ninety percent of the stuff. They never tried to run the state. They never wanted to.<sup>30</sup>

The lobbyist's job may be becoming more difficult as indicated by a memo Holmes prepared in May 1975, at the request of Associated Press general news editor Jack Cappon:

A number of lobbyists confessed to a feeling of helplessness in trying to oppose measures, saying they simply couldn't get a handle on how to stop a certain bill's forward progress.

An illustration probably was the 1975 Montana Legislature's major new revenue measure--a bill taxing coal. . . . Veteran observers said it was the political maneuvering on the coal-tax package of bills that frustrated lobbyists who felt their most logical arguments were simply ignored.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Helena (Mont.) Independent Record, February 22, 1973, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> May 8, 1980.

<sup>31</sup> J. D. Holmes memo to Jack Cappon (AP general news editor), May 16, 1975, p. 19, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

### Holmes on the Legislature

During the time Holmes sat the press table, he saw:

1. the number of measures introduced each session more than double;
2. both biennial and annual sessions;
3. numerous politicians get their start in the legislature;
4. an increase in the number of female legislators;
5. the birth of the Legislative Council;
6. reapportionment to conform with the U.S. Supreme Court's one-man, one-vote ruling;
7. creation of single-member districts;
8. total control of the legislature by both parties; and
9. moves to create a unicameral legislature.

Holmes attributes the growth in legislation introduced to a faster pace of life and more complex problems in the 1970s. In 1949, 632 measures were introduced. The Session Laws, which contain all the bills signed into law, were contained in one 737-page volume. By contrast, 1,464 measures were introduced in 1977 and two volumes totaling 2,339 pages were necessary to print the Session Laws.

He cites environmental laws as among the most complex and thus the most lengthy. He said they also account for some increase in the number of laws passed.

The growth in government, Holmes said, has resulted in it having a greater influence in private lives:

After watching for thirty years, I think there is too much regulation, too much interference in private lives and private business. Environmental laws are restricting private enterprise to the point where job opportunities are being affected. You get this on the national level too.<sup>32</sup>

Holmes said environmental issues were not prominent until 1963 when the legislators spent considerable time debating three bills dealing with air pollution. A story he wrote about Gov. Tim Babcock appointing an air-pollution study committee April 4, 1964, summarized the 1963 legislature's discussion of air-pollution control:

The 1963 legislative session spent considerable time arguing three bills that would have set up a state air pollution control program backed by law. None got majority approval, being attacked as too restrictive, opposed by the industry, or controlled by industry rather than the Board of Health.

The general feeling of the legislature seemed to be that air pollution control is needed, but not to the extent that industry would be injured by too restrictive laws.<sup>33</sup>

As for covering environmental legislation, Holmes said the stories "occupy a lot of space in newspapers but nine out of ten people are not interested in reading about it."<sup>34</sup> He described environmental legislation as long and involved and said that as a reporter he "got tired of it after a while."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>May 8, 1980.

<sup>33</sup>Helena (Mont.) Independent Record, April 4, 1963, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup>May 8, 1980.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.



At the same time, he received praise for his ability to explain the complex environmental issues. In 1965:

May I express my compliments to you men in behalf of the Governor's Air Pollution Control Legislative Study Committee for the par-excellance reporting of this Committee's meeting in Helena on November 23, 1965. . . .<sup>36</sup>

In 1977:

I would like to take this opportunity to compliment Mr. J. D. Holmes on the accuracy of the newspaper article which appeared in the July 6, 1977, Independent Record.

It is a pleasure to talk with Mr. Holmes. He translated an extremely complicated problem into a very accurate and readable message. . . .<sup>37</sup>

More complex problems and the faster pace of life are also the reasons Holmes believes Montana should have annual sessions. He cites the necessity of special sessions to support his contention.

In modern times, annual sessions would be advantageous. Things change so fast. Look at today's situation. The governor [Thomas L. Judge] wants to use the coal tax to bail out the University System but [Fort Shaw Democratic Senator Larry] Fasbender is saying he can't do it. With inflation, the two-year lag is working a hardship. The Highway Patrol is crippled by gasoline prices; state salaries and operating budgets are inadequate.<sup>38</sup>

Holmes does not believe, however, that economic issues are the lone reason for annual sessions and thinks

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<sup>36</sup>C. A. Cromwell (Chairman, Group II, Air Pollution Control Legislative Study Committee) letter to J. D. Holmes and Tom Mooney, December 9, 1965.

<sup>37</sup>John C. Braunbeck (Fuel Allocation Officer, Montana Energy Office, Office of the Lieutenant Governor) letter to AP Bureau Chief Hugh van Swearingen, July 13, 1980.

<sup>38</sup>May 8, 1980.

annual meetings should be open to any legislation. "If you restrict, you end up with problems."<sup>39</sup>

He said the longer biennial sessions have upset the checks-and balances system between urban and rural because many farmers and ranchers cannot afford to be away from home for the ninety-day sessions.

Holmes often has wondered why a lawyer would want to be a legislator, particularly because he should be able to make more money practicing law.

Either they are not too busy or they can afford it. Maybe it's a vacation for them. Or, it's political ambition. I feel lawyers are often persons with political ambitions.<sup>40</sup>

He said that through the years one of the most common ways to move up in politics has been through the legislature and the officials elected the past thirty years bear this out. While Holmes was an Associated Press reporter, five of the seven governors,<sup>41</sup> all eight lieutenant governors, and eight of the fourteen U.S. congressmen and senators had first been elected to the Montana Legislature.

Holmes also witnessed an increase in the number of women serving in the legislature. While the first women were elected to the Montana Legislature in 1917, no more than four served in any session until nine were elected for the

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>May 8, 1980.

<sup>41</sup>John Bonner, 1949-53, and Sam Ford, 1941-49, did not serve in the legislature. Both were attorney general.

annual sessions in 1973 and 1974. In 1975, thirteen women served and in 1977 fourteen were legislators.<sup>42</sup>

He found covering women no different from covering the men who served. "Some were pretty dense, some pretty sharp--the same as with men."<sup>43</sup>

The six-year struggle to create the Legislative Council provides Holmes with numerous stories.

In tracing its history, Holmes said the first effort to create the interim council began with the first "Little Hoover Commission" on the reorganization of state government in 1951. Headed by Sen. Glenn Larson, Sanders County Republican, it met twenty-four times between the 1951 and 1953 sessions to lay the groundwork.

The first Legislative Council was formed in 1953 with Sen. Bill MacKay, a Carbon County Republican, as its chairman. It was abolished by the state Supreme Court, which ruled it was unconstitutional.

Sen. Earl Moritz, a Fergus County Republican, was chairman of the second "Little Hoover Commission" in 1955. Its constitutionality was taken to the Supreme Court by the Board of Examiners, which refused to pay claims for operating expenses. It was found unconstitutional because its members were named before Gov. J. Hugo Aronson signed the bill creating it.

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<sup>42</sup>J. D. Holmes Black Book.

<sup>43</sup>May 8, 1980.

In 1957, the Legislature succeeded in establishing an interim council. When the Board of Examiners refused to pay ten claims totaling \$261, the Supreme Court ruled it must because legislators could serve on an interim council that had strictly legislative functions.

Holmes said the birth of the council benefited the legislative process and was long overdue. He thinks because the legislature does not meet every year the council is mandatory.

Holmes thinks it was a mistake to reapportion as was dictated by the U.S. Supreme Court one-man, one-vote ruling and called the election of one senator from each county a much better system.

There was always a big difference between the Senate and the House. When they began electing senators from districts of equal population, the difference vanished. Now, you have one [chamber] watching the other.<sup>44</sup>

In the memo to Cappon, Holmes stated:

The 1967 session . . . was the first to function under a reapportionment formula established by a panel of three federal court judges after the 1965 session had refused to pass a reapportionment formula along the lines of a U.S. Supreme Court decision. That 1967 reapportionment, however, had no dramatic impact on legislation other than to shift some voting power from rural areas to urban centers. Observers, however, do not recall that cities derived any great benefits.

Before the reapportionment . . . senators representing 16.1 percent of the state's population could muster 51 percent of the Senate votes.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>J. D. Holmes memo to Jack Cappon (AP general news editor), May 16, 1975, p. 8, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

He recalled that Sen. Dave Manning, a Hysham Democrat and the nation's longest serving legislator, led the fight to block a reapportionment formula in the 1965 session.

Holmes said reapportionment left newsmen unsure how to identify legislators who represented more than one county. When the decision was made to identify by hometowns, Holmes wrote a story:

How will newsmen identify members of the 40th Montana Legislature which convenes in January 1967?

In the past, it's been Sen. Soandso, D-Lincoln, or Rep. Doe, R-Carter.

But under the reapportionment . . . the traditional identification would be cumbersome and, if many lawmakers are listed, space consuming.

. . . Five of the 69 districts have four counties each, five are comprised of three counties each and 17 others each have two counties.

Under the old system this would produce an unwieldy Sen. Whozzis, R-Carter, Fallon, Wibaux and Prairie, or an awkward Rep. Whoami, D-Rosebud, Treasure, Garfield and Petroleum.

Legislative observers contacted by the Associated Press feel the use of district numbers would add nothing but confusion.

It would be years, if ever, before the newspaper reader and broadcast listener would know that Sen. Noname, R-12, speaks for the people of Musselshell, Golden Valley, Wheatland and Sweet Grass counties.

So, what's the answer?

Simply identify the lawmakers by party and city of residence, such as Sen. Soandso, D-Libby, or Rep. Doe, R-Ekalaka.

. . . To avoid confusion, the thinking is that identification by city should be used in all cases despite the fact there remains 42 single-county districts.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune, August 31, 1965, p. 1.

Holmes thinks the establishment of single-member legislative districts under the 1972 Montana Constitution had more impact than did the 1967 reapportionment:

. . . the consequences of the major legislative reapportionment of the 1960s . . . were not substantial in comparison to the consequences of single-member districting. . . .

Both reapportionment and redistricting did change voting habits, giving an upper hand to interests other than agriculture.<sup>47</sup>

He said the single-member districts make the legislature less partisan, give individual citizens greater influence on lawmaking decisions, and diminish the power of political parties and organized pressure groups.

During his tenure at the legislature, Holmes also witnessed the greatest turnover in legislators since the first session in 1889-90. He attributes the forty-eight percent turnover in 1975 to the institution of single-member districts. Another reason was that some legislators decided annual meetings were too frequent. These incumbents bowed out before the people voted in November 1974, to discontinue annual sessions.

Holmes said taxes, highways, and education were always major sources for stories during legislative sessions.

He singled out the sales tax session of 1967 and 1971 as the most interesting. He said the sales tax issue overshadowed everything in 1971.

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<sup>47</sup>J. D. Holmes memo to Jack Cappon (AP general news editor), May 16, 1975, p. 13, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

He praised Rep. James Lucas, Miles City Republican, who led the effort to put the sales tax on the ballot, calling him the most effective Speaker of the House he covered.

I have always been a great admirer of his ability. Everyone is. The only mistake he made was speaking for the sales tax. Lucas was not particularly for the sales tax but was a loyal party man and thought the people had a right to vote on it. It was a shame he had to waste his talents on the sales tax.<sup>48</sup>

Holmes said he did not intend to minimize the abilities of the other speakers he covered but emphasized that "none was any better than Lucas."<sup>49</sup>

He said the 1961 Legislature, an austerity budget session, was the most significant he covered. That session began with Gov. Donald Nutter, a Republican, asking for belt tightening and \$4.5 million less than had been appropriated for the 1959-61 biennium. Holmes recalled that Nutter admitted his budget "might shock and offend" but that Nutter was determined to end the state's deficit spending and did so.

Holmes said the Equal Rights Amendment resolution in the 1973 and 1974 sessions provided material for numerous stories but unhappily for him most of the controversy occurred in the Senate. "I always wished it had happened in the House,"<sup>50</sup> Holmes said about the ERA

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<sup>48</sup>May 8, 1980.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

debate and particularly Belt Democratic Sen. Jack McDonald's speech declaring if Jesus had been for equal rights, he would have had six male and six female apostles.

During four of the regular sessions Holmes covered, one political party controlled the House, Senate, and governorship. In 1953, the Republicans had control; in 1973, 1974, and 1975, the Democrats controlled all three.

Holmes said the usual division of political power results from the predominantly independent nature of the Montana voters and that the division is a weakness because it tends to conceal political responsibility.

The advantage of a single party controlling both houses and the governorship, Holmes said, is that the buck-passing stops because the party in power cannot blame the minority.

He said the minority's position was best described by Sen. David James, Libery County Democrat, before the 1955 session when the Republicans controlled the Senate:

We are about in the same position as a back seat driver. We can offer advice, point out dangers, criticize abundantly and even attempt to seize the wheel.

But in the end the real boss (the majority) does as he desires, although he is often influenced by the good advice and sometimes prejudiced by the nagging from the minority.<sup>51</sup>

Holmes said there is a "different air" to the legislature when one party is in control and that party's

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<sup>51</sup>AP printout dated December 9, 1954, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.



platform items usually go through with ease--except in the 1970s when the Democrats were in control. In 1975, three major platform bills failed as the Democrats were able to enact only sixty-five percent of the bills implementing their platform.

While Holmes did not cover the 1972 Constitutional Convention, he did write related stories and was present at the signing of the document June 20, 1972.

He does not believe in a unicameral body. He originally backed the bicameral system, then "liked the unicameral for a long time. But, recently I came back to the bicameral side. I now subscribe to the theory of the two houses being a check and balance on each other."<sup>52</sup>

Holmes favored the unicameral because "the two houses allow legislators to cop out by sending controversial legislation to the other house. Only the members in the final house have to bite the bullet."<sup>53</sup>

But he now backs the bicameral because "no matter what they say, no other state besides Nebraska has gone to the unicameral. If it were the way to go, more states would have bicameral legislatures."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>May 8, 1980.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

## Holmes the Lobbyist

Unable to stay away from the legislature when he retired, Holmes became in 1979 the first registered, paid lobbyist for the Montana Arts Advocacy.

The citizens group formed to promote the interests of the Montana Arts Council, the Montana Historical Society, and the Montana State Library solicited contributions to fund his lobbying efforts for the agencies whose employees could not themselves lobby.

The transition from reporter to lobbyist--particularly giving up the floor privilege--was not easy:

It bothered me at first. I'd been there so long, it felt like the place belonged to me. I found myself starting to walk in [to the Senate and House] after the time was up. I couldn't use the washroom between the House any longer as a shortcut. Heck, I had been at the legislature before some of them [current legislators and reporters] were even born.<sup>55</sup>

He lobbied seventeen bills and one resolution and proudly points out that all eighteen passed. He concedes that some changes were made in the legislation, but he is especially proud that coal tax money was appropriated for the state library.

While Montanans no longer read his byline in 1979, they did read about him in a Great Falls Tribune story January 27, 1979, which carried the headline "Ex-reporter in transition to lobbyist."

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<sup>55</sup>June 30, 1980.

J. D. Holmes, a fixture on the legislative scene for the past 30 years, is playing a different role this session. . . .

"I've changed from an old pro in the news reporting business to a neophyte in the new endeavor of lobbying," Holmes said. He will admit, however, that because of his past experiences with the Legislature, he has a leg up on new lobbyists.

He said that many legislators still confuse him for a reporter. "I tell them I'm just wearing a different hat now," he said.

He said he gets "horse laughs" from people when he asks advice on how to operate as a lobbyist.

"They think I ought to know about as much as anyone about the Legislature," he said. "I'm knowledgeable about how the Legislature operates, but lobbying is new to me. . . ."

Holmes said he's spoken with former legislators who are now lobbyists, such as Pat McKittrick and Ray Wayrynen--to get some tips. "They say there is no formula," said Holmes.

But, he's finding out that the stereotyped Montana lobbyist who looks like he's standing around the legislative halls all day drinking coffee is actually working quite hard trying to find out what's going on.

Much of the standing around results from waiting around to talk to legislators, he said.

In all his years as reporter, he never had much access problem to legislators because reporters have full floor privileges. He finds that the rules which bar lobbyists from the floor of the Senate an hour before the session begins and from the floor of the House two hours before a session does get in the way of his ability to talk to some legislators.

Although he finds lobbying exhausting, he's enjoying the experience.

He finds it difficult to assess how well he's doing. "At least as a reporter, you could see how well you did by the stories each day," he said.

Holmes said he is glad to be around the 1979 Legislature.

When he retired, he said he felt badly because he had no reason to be around the Legislature. Lobbying gave him the excuse to be around. . . .<sup>56</sup>

He was mentioned in the January 4, 1979, "Legislative Update" radio program broadcast statewide by the Montana

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<sup>56</sup>Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune, January 27, 1979, p. 10.

Wool Growers Association, Montana Stockgrowers Association, Montana Chamber of Commerce, and Montana Taxpayers Association.

J. D. Holmes, now a retired newsman for Associated Press, sat in the House gallery. J. D. has taken a job for this session as a lobbyist for the arts. . . . He and Dave Manning, the Hysham senator, have been around the Capitol the longest.

Before the session was over, Harlem Democrat Francis Bardanouve dubbed him "Mr. Culture" and three Arts Advocacy members helping lobby began calling him "Charlie" and themselves "J. D.'s Angels." On the wall in his library, he has a photo of himself and the three--Cheryl Hutchinson, Joeann Daley, and Millie Sullivan.

Holmes was unsure if he would lobby in 1981. After he and his wife took a two-week oceanliner cruise in 1980, he did not know if he wanted to commit himself to staying in Helena. Finally, "after all my bills passed in 1979, there's no where to go but down."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> June 30, 1980. Subsequently he decided to lobby for the arts in the 1981 session.

## CHAPTER VII

As AP's man at the state capitol for most of those 30 years Holmes had a virtual lock on the news about state government which got into Montana newspapers, radio stations and television sets.

The Associated Press is just that, an association of the press which works as a cooperative to generate news in the state. While the Great Falls Tribune and the four Lee Enterprises newspapers in Billings, Butte, Helena, and Missoula have reporters at the capitol, even they depend on the day-to-day capitol news to be generated by AP. It has made the man covering the capitol very powerful because what he writes is what's read, or heard about state government.<sup>1</sup>

The above is an overstatement because United Press International has numerous radio clients and until January 1968<sup>2</sup> also had a state newspaper wire. Yet it was Holmes' long history of "exclusive" stories that left the impression the Associated Press had a lock on state government news.

As he talks about reporting the capitol beat, it is the "exclusive" stories and getting better play

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<sup>1</sup>Tom Kotynski, "J.D. Holmes Reviews 30 Years of Legislators, Governors, Judges and Budgets," Montana Magazine of the Northern Rockies, January-February, 1979, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>The date was arrived at through a telephone interview with Hugh van Swearingen October 10, 1980 and checking wire service logos in the Lewistown Daily News. Van Swearingen said AP files indicated that Lewistown was one of the last newspapers to switch and that he recalled UPI discontinued its state newspaper wire because it had too few clients but did continue for a time to provide its state radio wire to the Billings Gazette which rewrote the stories.

than his United Press International counterpart that brings a smile to his face.

The AP Montana Log, a house organ for Associated Press members, regularly reported Holmes' exclusives and, on at least two occasions, printed lists of Holmes' exclusives. In July 1966:

THE CAPITOL BEAT--Holmes in the past several months pointed out that: accepting free rides in a corporate plane was not exclusive to Republican politics . . . Mike Kennedy's lone supporter on the Historical Society board of trustees was O'Neil Jones prior to Jones' solo vote to retain Kennedy as director . . . the Montana Supreme Court has a 3-year-old canon dealing with courtroom photography although some lawyers are trying to push through a much tougher rule . . . Gov. Tim Babcock's Senate campaign headquarters would be in an unused railroad station, while state GOP headquarters soon will move across the street from a depot.

Among Holmes' other recent exclusives from the Capitol beat:

- ...Inflation check delays 4 state U bid openings.
- ...Men tamed Montana but women are making it grow.
- ...District Judge studies motor vehicle assessment dispute.
- ...Regents set guidelines for community colleges.
- ...State study suggests ending most personal property taxes.
- ...Five firms must explain low cigarette prices.
- ...State gets bids on 21 of 310 coal tracts.
- ...Real estate panel picks new executive secretary.
- ...Rails, utilities valuations up 3.7 percent.
- ...State trades old 20-year leases for perpetual variety.
- ...Montana Supreme Court allows photos (and AP had the first ones).<sup>3</sup>

Bureau Chief David Beeder asked Holmes to make a list of ten or twelve exclusives in 1965, and Holmes came up with nineteen for use in the AP Montana Log:

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<sup>3</sup>AP Montana Log, July 1966, p. 3, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

## RECENT CAPITOL EXCLUSIVES:

First definite word that Babcock might be receptive to pressures to run for Senate against Metcalf.

(May 27)

First announcement that Montana was offering Arlee site for giant atom smasher. (June 2)

Aftermath of eastern Montana blizzards including loss figures. (July) (Suggested by Miles City Star.)

Babcock might name Democrat Si Emmons as State Labor Commissioner. (Aug. 18) (He did, on the 19th.)

Montana Bar Association urges lawyer fee schedule. (Aug. 22)

Prospectus of 1966 election. (Aug. 29) (No changes yet.)

Governor asks Robert Weintz to resign from Fish and Game Commission. (Oct. 11)

State warns five tobacco wholesalers for below cost cigarette sales. (Oct. 14)

Institutions Department to recommend job classification and compensation plan to 1967 legislative session. (Nov. 18)

Montana must slash Kerr Mills payments. (Nov. 22) (It was done Nov. 30.)

State stands to lose \$9 million a year in federal highway funds, starting in 1968. (Nov. 28)

Barclay Craighead heads 15-member committee on problems of the aging. (Dec. 3)

Highway Commission wants signs to serve motorists, new towns. (Dec. 5) (Suggested by Great Falls Tribune and Leader.)

Russell Smith seen as newest Federal Judge in Montana. (Dec. 6, the same day as U.S. District Judge W. D. Murray announced his retirement.)

Welfare Department announces job training program for mothers of dependent children. (Dec. 7)

Regents agenda for December meeting published when University System office denied it to newsmen prior to start of meeting. (Dec. 10) (This resulted in board ruling that agenda be given newsmen three days after it is mailed to regents.)

Proposed U.S. regulations of state interstate commerce taxes could cost state \$110,000. (Dec. 12)

Montana rides a winner in new Horse Racing Commission. (Dec. 24)

And, to start the new year, U.S. pumps \$3 million into Montana economy in assault on poverty. (Jan. 2, 1966)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>AP Montana Log, January 1966, p. 2, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

Books and movies portray reporters risking their lives for news stories, but the incidents in Holmes' life were not so dramatic.

In the 1950s the Associated Press office was situated in what is known as the "old" Independent Record building on South Last Chance Gulch. Holmes was writing on a typewriter facing a window.

I got up to go the bathroom down the hall. Before I was out of the room, I heard a noise that sounded like a crack. I went back over to the typewriter and found a bullet hole in the window right in front of where my head had been a few seconds earlier.

It was at night and I couldn't see anything out the window. I called the police. They dug a slug out of the wall and determined from the angle that it had been fired from the hill to the west.

Nothing ever came of it but it was a pretty spooky thing and everybody kept the blinds down at night after that.<sup>5</sup>

When he injured his finger in a capitol parking lot March 27, 1964, the Associated Press sent the story on its wires:

J. D. Holmes, 49, Capitol writer for the Associated Press, suffered a deep finger cut today when he attempted to assist a truck driver moving equipment in a Capitol driveway.

Holmes was taken to St. John's Hospital in Helena. The injury was to the index finger on Holmes' left hand [sic].

Holmes said the equipment, an air compressor unit, was blocking his car in a parking space at the Capitol.

He said when he attempted to assist the driver of a pickup truck in moving the unit an equipment stand collapsed on his finger. The equipment was being

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with J. D. Holmes, Helena, Montana, May 8, 1980. Subsequent footnotes for interviews with Holmes give the date only.



used in a Capitol remodeling project.<sup>6</sup>

The Billings Gazette staff sent regards on a message wire and jokingly asked the bureau chief to "tell J. D. he's working for AP, not Hoffa."<sup>7</sup>

Holmes had the end of his finger amputated April 2 and was back at work April 8, a week before the stitches were removed. He soon learned to use the stub in his hunt-and-peck typing system.

Holmes wrote a weekly column, "Montanalyzing," published on Sundays for eight years beginning in 1966. In the column, politicians sent up their trial balloons, predictions were made about resignations and appointments, and inside capitol information was revealed.

Holmes, who always liked writing columns, said "Montanalyzing" was born by accident. He wrote a political story and slugged it "Montanalyzing." The newspapers began using the slug line as a description of the political pieces he wrote.

The first "Montanalyzing" was printed January 17, 1966, and carried the headline "Lobby Poised to Defeat Babcock Bid for Senate" in the Great Falls Tribune.

Holmes said he tried to write "Montanalyzing" in a light vein to make it easy to read. Many of the items in

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<sup>6</sup>AP printout dated March 27, 1964, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana. It was the index finger of the right hand.

<sup>7</sup>Billings (Mont.) Gazette message to Helena AP, March 1964, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

the column were spot news stories he saved to make the column interesting.

One topic that Holmes liked to include in the column was salaries paid to top state officials. He said one of the reasons he wrote about the salaries whenever they were increased is that it always irked him that the governor was not the top-paid state employee. He recalled that when he wrote about salaries, it usually annoyed people.

The governor of Montana has slipped downward on the state's pay-scale ladder.

Currently, for the fiscal year which began July 1, at least 33 jobs in state government pay more than the \$23,250-a-year received by Gov. Forrest H. Anderson.

One year ago, at least 23 state employees were better paid than the governor.

By contrast, the state's chief executive ranked 14th in fiscal 1969-70 and 6th in 1968-69. . . .<sup>8</sup>

One column that was a spot news story:

"It is an illusion," say the experts, "that we can eliminate Montana's fiscal problems by eliminating waste."

The same experts declare: "Unless Montanans can be content with fewer public services, there is no hope of paring millions from the budget."

The words are from a state fiscal report still preliminary and still under wraps. . . .<sup>9</sup>

"Montanalyzing" was discontinued on a regular basis when, in September 1972, Bureau Chief Paul Freeman made Holmes the day editor.

He had been strapped with the Capitol beat too

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<sup>8</sup>AP printout of "Montanalyzing" for August 22, 1977, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

<sup>9</sup>AP printout of "Montanalyzing" for July 26, 1977, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

long. He'd covered it for more than two decades and had seen it all before. He needed something different and the AP needed someone with a fresh approach at the Capitol.

The change was not a discredit of J. D.'s ability. He is a marvelous reporter, a vacuum cleaner, and an overall professional, one of the great people of the world.<sup>10</sup>

As day editor, he had neither the regular contact nor the time to continue the column. He liked the reassignment:

It was a welcome change. No matter what job you're in, you need change. I did more in broadcast the last few years and that was interesting.<sup>11</sup>

Bureau Chief Hugh van Swearingen said Holmes preferred the desk job to the Capitol the last few years and was a meticulous deskman. "If other editors weren't keeping up the day file, he'd write them notes to remind them."<sup>12</sup>

In December 1972, Holmes wrote two pre-legislative columns, one of which pointed out the increase in female legislators for the 1973 session and traced the history of women in the legislature.

The final series of "Montanalyzing" was printed in April and May 1973, when Holmes was at the Capitol full time while his replacement, Steve Rosenfeld, was on vacation.

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<sup>10</sup>Telephone interview with Paul Freeman, Helena, Montana-Raleigh, North Carolina, May 3, 1980.

<sup>11</sup>June 19, 1980.

<sup>12</sup>Telephone interview with Hugh van Swearingen, Helena, Montana, June 30, 1980.

One column in the final series predicted state jobs for two of Holmes' acquaintances from the legislature, Ravalli County legislators known as the "Gold Dust" twins. As predicted in the column, Norris Nichols and William Groff were appointed to state revenue department positions.

The final column, printed May 27, 1973, predicted two appointments by Gov. Thomas L. Judge. The lead:

Look for one member of the new Board of Regents [Ted James] to be doing double duty as head of Montana's blue-ribbon commission to probe higher education in the state.<sup>13</sup>

It also predicted in a separate item that Hal Stearns, retired Harlowton weekly newspaper publisher, would be named to head the Bicentennial effort in Montana. The predictions were accurate.

#### Reporting the Capitol

In 1964, Holmes was asked to prepare a memo detailing his routine at the Capitol. The result:

6:45 a.m. Beat the alarm by 15 minutes; collected Great Falls Tribune at door and read it, through breakfast, until 8 a.m. What looked like a dull day newswise was brightened by Trib's use of most of my stories of previous day.

8:30 a.m. Entered Gov. Tim Babcock's office after three-mile drive from home. Nothing stirring as governor campaigning in eastern Montana; had coffee with his receptionist, Mrs. Jean Morris, and Helena Independent Record staffer, Lyle Downing, discussed the state's Territorial Centennial program and World's Fair exhibit, agreeing state will get back none of its \$200,000 investment in the year-long program. Queried

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<sup>13</sup>AP printout of "Montanalyzing" for May 27, 1980, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

Mrs. Morris about a Don Byrd, identified in morning Trib as administrative assistant of governor; found he is a handyman in campaign office and definitely is not administrative aide.

9 a.m. Called on Atty. Gen. Forrest H. Anderson. He was out, so talked politics with two of his assistants, Don Garrity and Louis Forsell; learned 180 persons attended a county Democratic dinner the night before. Checked Supreme Court chambers, chatting briefly with Justice Stanley M. Doyle and picking up a memo by Chief Justice James T. Harrison explaining "per curiam" opinions are unanimous unless otherwise noted. This was the day's first story. In Board of Examiners office, told Executive Clerk M. William McEnaney about security measures taken for President Johnson in Great Falls Wednesday. He asked for details, knowing I was there. In office of Supreme Court Clerk Thomas J. Kearney, ran into Jerry Lowney, down from Great Falls to take an insurance exam. Lowney is Young Democrats director for Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado. He informed me that at Atlantic City convention, Walter Cronkite was the unfriendliest person he met and Pierre Salinger the friendliest. We agreed both had reasons for their meet-the-public attitudes.

9:30 a.m. Called on State Budget Director Richard E. Morris; no news. His budget analyst, Mrs. Barbara Miller, was pleasant but equally unhelpful. Downing was along so didn't press for some exclusive budget data I'm expecting. Visited Railroad Commissioner Jack Holmes (no relation) and told him that when I checked into Great Falls hotel Tuesday night, prior to President's visit, my reservation was gone and desk clerk said Jack Holmes must have got it by mistake. Not so, he said, as we parted amiably but with no addition to my slim news pickings. The commission secretary, Mrs. Katherine DuBois, had nothing to contribute, either. Went back to Court Clerk Kearney's office to see if he had extra copies of briefs for 10 a.m. hearing of Bozeman Chronicle interest; only got the brief of one side. Ran into governor's real administrative aide, Edward W. Nelson, who said there may be an audit of Centennial Train books. He will keep me advised.

10 a.m. Went to Supreme Court for arguments in appeal involving a special improvement district. A court attache told me to expect an opinion at 2 p.m. of western Montana interest. For next half hour listened to lawyers for both sides attempt to explain very technical stuff about assessment areas.

10:30 a.m. Picked up Downing in governor's office; walked block to Sam W. Mitchell state office building to get weekly report from Fish and Game Department; publicist Vern Craig was a little swamped because several office girls were home sick. We were sympathetic but left him muttering and walked another block to Highway Department building; assistant information man Ernie Neath was putting together a throwaway for a highway dedication at Butte next Thursday. This was not hot news as it was moved several days earlier.

11 a.m. Drove three miles to AP office in Independent Record building; doffed coat, rolled up sleeves, poured coffee and read day report. Wrote two court stories which Day Editor Jack Zygmund filed before going to lunch.

11:45 a.m. Took over desk; checked date book; clipped TTS [newspaper] and radio wires; read state radio report for day; wrote spot summary for 1230 pms split; file so light had to use my court yarns in spot to provide something new; wrote a nightwire story out of the Fish and Game handout I brought in.

12:45 p.m. Quiet lunch at home, three blocks from office.

1:45 p.m. Called on Historical Museum Director Michael Kennedy, mostly to return a photo borrowed to illustrate a 100-years-ago feature; he insisted on talking politics, so we did. He had no ideas for a news story, a good illustration of the day's quietness.

2 p.m. Back to the Mitchell building to visit Planning Board. Director Sam Chapman was in Denver and his assistant in Portland, Ore. Their secretary, Lauri McCarthy, was writing headlines for the board magazine. She said the articles were easier than the heads. Chatted with Institutions Director Maurice Harmon in the elevator; still no news.

2:30 p.m. Returned to Capitol. Called on Secretary of State Frank Murray, one of the few elective officers around; he had nothing new since yesterday's item about his certification of Nov. 3 ballots to county clerks. He liked our story about it which, incidentally, Night Editor Doug Huigen handled.

3 p.m. Chatted with governor aide Nelson in hall, then headed for Land Office. Passing coffee counter, was hailed by Downing and Frank Small of independent weekly, Peoples Voice, for coffee; learned nothing new. Called on Land Commissioner Mons L. Teigen; he was drinking coffee with two aides and had nothing to contribute. Stopped next door to talk to one of Teigen's staff, Mrs. Eva Janet Smith, head of

the Mineral Department. She had just completed a report on 13 years of oil leasing activity on state lands and proffered it--my first exclusive of the day.

3:30 p.m. Paid my afternoon call to Railroad and Public Service Commission; found Commissioner Lou Boedecker and four office girls having coffee and cake; no news. Went to Legislative Council office; director was in conference; secretary Mrs. Rosemary Acher was beginning to index all of the bills introduced in the last three sessions. She promised me a copy in December, which will be a big help in the legislative session beginning in January. The council's researcher, Don Sorte, was free, so we discussed reapportionment in Montana and Illinois; nothing conclusive but good background.

4 p.m. In attorney general's office, found Associate Justice John C. Harrison and three assistant attorneys talking about the difficulty of obtaining counsel in justice courts. No one had any story ideas, however, so went to governor's office and told Mrs. Morris the latest story I'd picked up about Babcock. She's partisan and didn't find it funny.

4:10 p.m. Governor checked into office by phone from Wolf Point where he was with a GOP campaign caravan. She asked me to tell him the story. I did and he thought it was funny. A speaker at last night's Democratic dinner is supposed to have told it like this: Senate Pres. Dave Manning, a Democrat, was acting governor when the June floods hit Montana. He wired Babcock for advice on what to do. The governor wired back: Get all the trucks on high ground. To appreciate it, you have to know that Babcock was and is a truck firm operator. The governor said his PR man was working on a story that would be phoned to the AP later. (It wasn't.)

4:30 p.m. Back in AP office. Discussed a story with Independent Record Editor Bob Miller; wrote a wire advisory, then the Supreme Court opinion story I picked up on afternoon Capitol run; also the story about oil activity bringing the state \$24 million since 1951. Did two political pieces, one taken on the phone from a stringer and the other delivered by a messenger.

6 p.m. Called it a day--almost. Dropped back later to produce this log, after dinner and a series of TV premiere programs.

jdh 9/18/64 11 pms<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>J. D. Holmes, "A Working Day in the Life of AP's Montana Capitol Writer J. D. Holmes," September 18, 1964.

Holmes' research and recordkeeping for backgrounding stories led to his developing the famous--at least among Montana journalists--Black Book as well as his extensive files and notebooks.

### Black Book, Files, and Notebooks

How many women had served in the Montana legislature through 1979, who were they, and when was the first woman elected?

Who was the majority leader of the 1975 Montana Senate, where was he from, and to which party did he belong?

Name the number of Montana Judicial Districts and the counties included in each.

When was the position of state budget director created and who has filled the job?

How many state treasurers died in office? Who was appointed to replace them?

Who were the delegates to Congress from the Territory of Montana?

Who was elected governor in 1948 and by how many votes did he defeat his opponent in the general election?

Holmes calls his Black Book, which contains the answers to the above questions and almost any other statistical information a state government reporter would need, a highlight summary of his files. He started his Black Book because the books published on election results



contain "more damn errors than you can poke a stick at."<sup>15</sup>

Holmes says that no one else could understand his collection of notebooks compiled over the past seventeen years.

He is proud that other reporters began using similar notebooks, but wishes he had started his organized note collection earlier. The notebooks span 209 months, beginning April 3, 1961, and ending September 18, 1978. The five-by-seven inch spiral-bound notebooks each contain an average of seven weeks of notes.

Crossing out information he had used in news stories was a regular part of his daily routine. He did not always use the information from his notebook the same day because some notes were jotted down for features or "Montanalyzing."

Not to be found in his notebooks are names of sources who wanted to be kept confidential.

I didn't write their names down anywhere. I was always afraid someone might look over my shoulder and see a name. I got a lot of tips for stories because people knew I would never reveal my sources.<sup>16</sup>

By filing clippings from the Tribune and Independent Record, letters, agendas, and any other items he thought might provide background information, Holmes compiled undoubtedly the most complete record of Montana government and personalities for the past thirty years.

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<sup>15</sup>October 5, 1979.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

Clippings in the thirty-three legal-length, letter-size file drawers date to the early 1950s and are marked with the date the news story appeared. "I use any old envelopes. They reflect all kinds of mail I've received over the years."<sup>17</sup>

The files contain items such as a copy of the letter Robert Johns wrote when he resigned as University of Montana president, Holmes' overtime slip the week of the Yellowstone Earthquake in 1959, and the Office of Public Instruction's explanation of the School Foundation Program in the early 1950s. Fligelman, Floods, and Fluorination are the headings on three of the envelopes while examples of the labels on the drawers include Hinman-Indians, Olsen-Polygraph, Auditors-Bozeman, and Morgan-O'Leary.

Holmes has special-ordered the file drawers through the years. That twelve of them are a slightly darker color bothers him; he quickly points out the difference to a visitor in his office-library.

About his method of filing, Holmes said: "Someone else trying to use my files will say 'how the hell would a crazy guy like Holmes have filed these.'"<sup>18</sup>

While he has rearranged the files two or three times, he plans to rearrange them again to reflect the reorganization of state government under Gov. Forrest Anderson in

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the early 1970s. He eventually hopes to donate the files to the State Historical Library.

### Reporting Techniques

Holmes believes the best news sources are not always the people at the top. He took time to visit with secretaries every day. As a result, they became acquainted with him and would give him tips, often unintentionally.

A secretary chatting might say her boss was meeting with so-and-so. Knowing what the issues were, Holmes knew what was being discussed from who was meeting with whom. Then, seeing or telephoning one of the participants later in the day, he would ask: "Did you settle such and such?" The participant did not know Holmes was only theorizing what had been discussed and would give him a direct answer such as: "No, but we are going to on Wednesday."<sup>19</sup>

The secretaries came to trust Holmes because he was so friendly and began sympathizing with his need to get stories. They often would tell him to check with certain state officials who might (and usually did) have a story.

Holmes occasionally would leave secretaries candy. "I did it on my own and it was not very often. I didn't turn it in as an expense at the office. I just thought they deserved it once in a while."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> June 19, 1980.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

One time he gave candy to the secretary of state's office staff, and he received a two-foot-square thank-you valentine signed by everyone including Frank Murray:

To that nice young man from the A.P.  
Who's known far and wide as J.D.  
Thank you for the candy  
It was really jim dandy  
And made us superbly hap-py!

Holmes and his wife both like to entertain and invited elected officials and reporters to parties in their home. Holmes also was a member of a poker club comprising state officials and reporters which met regularly at his home. He does not think socializing with news sources affected his objectivity.

I never felt you could become too close to sources. Even when people had been at my house, they knew that when I was at the Capitol I was a newsman looking for news.<sup>21</sup>

Holmes rarely sat still while on the Capitol beat as he checked and rechecked offices and observed who was talking with whom in the halls.

After each round, he used the reception area of the governor's office to rest. There he was alert not only to who was entering and leaving, but also to the phone calls.

It all added up. You could tell what was going on by who was in the governor's office or who came out to get the visitor. I pieced many things together by who called the governor's office and who the receptionist routed the call to or who someone asked the receptionist to call.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

One story he pieced together in this manner was the selection of Robert Johns as Montana State University<sup>23</sup> president in 1963. Holmes was in the reception area when the selection committee was meeting. Someone came out and asked the receptionist to call Johns. Holmes surmised Johns had been chosen, went back to the Associated Press office and made a call to confirm it. He does not remember if it was to Gov. Tim Babcock, Johns, or a member of the committee. The story:

Dr. Robert Johns, executive vice president of the University of Miami, Coral Gables, Fla., apparently will be offered the presidency of Montana State University.

. . . The Board of Regents, which considered the two finalists at a closed session Tuesday, is expected to announce Johns' selection Thursday.

There were indications that Johns would be advised informally of the offer by telephone Wednesday.<sup>24</sup>

Holmes' reporting of the Capitol beat consisted of spot news and occasional in-depth stories such as the one prompting the 1975 special session. He rarely did any investigative reporting.

I never really had any time to do investigative reporting. That's what we left to the Lee State Bureau and Tribune Capitol Bureau. Those guys had more time because they didn't have to file the basic report of state government each day. They could take two or three days and spend them digging on a story.

We had such a small bureau and over the years at the AP editors meetings they apparently agreed that

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<sup>23</sup>Now, University of Montana.

<sup>24</sup>Helena (Mont.) Independent Record, August 14, 1963, p. 1.

was the way they wanted it--the Trib Capitol Bureau and the Lee Bureau doing the side stuff. That's the way it still works. The Trib Bureau is still doing the digging.<sup>25</sup>

"Accuracy was the key thing with me,"<sup>26</sup> Holmes said of his writing which he acknowledged was criticized for not enough color. "Most reporters never wrote as tightly and tersely as I did either."<sup>27</sup>

It was his reporting spot news rather than doing investigative reporting that led to criticism. He was accused of not writing stories that would alienate sources, of being a "water boy" for governors and of being pro-Montana Power. The criticisms:

J.D. wrote for his sources. He wrote only stories that wouldn't make them mad. He was fair in the stories he wrote but he picked topics that suited his sources. He didn't pick controversial topics that would anger his sources.<sup>28</sup>

For years, this man [Holmes] has been the stable boy for both the Republican Governor and the large corporate interests. Inevitably when either leaves litter in the barnyard . . . this man is given the broom with which to clean up the mess.<sup>29</sup>

I thought he wrote for his sources at times. That may be a matter of interpretation. He knew people so intimately that he backed off subjects

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<sup>25</sup> June 19, 1980.

<sup>26</sup> June 30, 1980.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Mike Voeller, Helena, Montana, June 29, 1980.

<sup>29</sup> Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune, November 2, 1967, p. 4.

or took things they told him as casual conversation.<sup>30</sup>

State Sen. LeRoy Anderson, who aspires to the Democratic gubernatorial nomination and thence the governor's office, is going around the state telling whoever will listen that he is an enemy of Gov. Tim Babcock, Atty. Gen. Forrest Anderson, the "power company," and, oh yes, reporter J.D. Holmes, all of whom, he contends, share a bed.<sup>31</sup>

About the charge that he favored Montana Power, Holmes said he tried to be objective no matter what the subject. "I went down the middle. I quoted both sides. Montana Power was just like anyone else. My job was to cover the news."<sup>32</sup>

Bureau Chief Paul Freeman regularly evaluated each staff writer. Holmes has kept a note from Freeman about his choice of attribution in a Montana Power story.

A slight bit of editorializing in the 2nd take [second half] of ur [your] Friday Public Utilities story. U [you] say MPC President George "O'Connor pointed out, however, that political units are not by nature efficient."

"Pointed out" puts the AP on record as establishing his remark as more or less of a truism. In case you have some Con Ed stock along with ur MPC stock, you might have some personal reason to believe that there are some governmental units, most likely, which operate much more efficiently than Con Ed. I think it is eminently arguable, also, as to whether the CIA is less efficient than Penn Central. The larger point, however, is that "pointed out" says something beyond "said" and doesn't say it nearly as well as having said "said."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Telephone interview with Bert Gaskill, Butte, Montana, June 30, 1980.

<sup>31</sup>Helena (Mont.) Independent Record, April 19, 1968, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup>June 19, 1980.

<sup>33</sup>Paul Freeman, memo to J. D. Holmes, January 25, 1975, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

Holmes agrees with Freeman. "I guess I probably just got tired of using 'said' all the way through the story and was trying to make it more interesting. I shouldn't have."<sup>34</sup>

Freeman said in a telephone interview that there was no validity to the criticism that Holmes was pro-Montana Power. Freeman's opinion is shared by his successor, Hugh van Swearingen,<sup>35</sup> Montana Standard Editor Bert Gaskill,<sup>36</sup> Helena Independent Record Editor Mike Voeller,<sup>37</sup> and Missoulian Editor Ed Coyle.<sup>38</sup>

Van Swearingen does not think Holmes wrote for his sources or intentionally served as a "water boy" to incumbent governors.

All AP capitol reporters get criticized for that from time to time. I was accused of that when I covered the capitol in Bismarck for two years. When you develop good sources, you don't like to lose them needlessly. But J. D. didn't protect his sources any more than any other reporter.

AP has to carry the handouts from the governors office. The handouts are intended to make the governor look good but even after we try to weed them out, ninety percent of the stories put him in a good light.

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<sup>34</sup>May 8, 1980.

<sup>35</sup>Telephone interview with Hugh van Swearingen, Helena, Montana, June 30, 1980.

<sup>36</sup>Telephone interview with Bert Gaskill, Butte, Montana, June 30, 1980.

<sup>37</sup>Interview with Mike Voeller, Helena, Montana, June 29, 1980.

<sup>38</sup>Telephone interview with Ed Coyle, Missoula, Montana, June 30, 1980.



The normal day in and day out job of an AP Capitol reporter is to record the daily happenings. He is not looking for the investigative story. He doesn't have much time. In J. D.'s case, he didn't like that. He was not an analysis reporter. In the ten years I worked with him, he never decided to "get" somebody and never went around looking under rocks.

He wrote very few stories critical of people because he was not an analysis-type reporter. His feelings about people would not show through.<sup>39</sup>

In a 1977 magazine article, when Holmes was no longer covering the Capitol full time, Tom Kotynski, Tribune Capitol reporter, named him one of the most influential men in the state.

From my perspective I'd pick Associated Press reporter J. D. Holmes as the most influential among the Montana Press. . . .

I estimate that no other man has had his name in print more times in the history of the state. Because Holmes rarely analyzes the news and because his reports are little more than barebones information, it has been said that his uncritical coverage of the Supreme Court led to the 20 years of "Castles Court."

. . . Likewise, in other areas Holmes has chosen for 30 years what information about state governments Montanans should or should not read. That is real influence. I was quite tempted to choose "J. D." ahead of Schwinden as "No. 1" [the most influential on Gov. Thomas L. Judge]<sup>40</sup>

While Holmes is flattered by being called influential, he took Kotynski to task for his comments about the "Castles Court":

What the hell was wrong with the Castles Court?  
I've always been annoyed at this kind of writing--

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<sup>39</sup>Telephone interview with Hugh van Swearingen, Helena, Montana, June 30, 1980.

<sup>40</sup>Tom Kotynski, "Who Influences State Government: the 10 Most Influential," Montana, Magazine of the Northern Rockies, Summer 1977, p. 39.

innuendos. Wes Castles has a great legal mind. His opinions were well thought out. Besides, he was not chief justice, [James T.] Harrison was.<sup>41</sup>

### Holmes on State Government

Holmes thinks the growth in state government during the thirty years he covered the Capitol was caused, in large part, by the federal government.

A lot of state government functions are delineated by the federal government. There's hardly any state government agency not impacted by a federal program. Given that, growth is just natural.<sup>42</sup>

He said executive reorganization during the Forrest Anderson Administration<sup>43</sup> was designed to create orderly growth by giving the governor more control.

Before executive reorganization, most agencies were run by part-time citizen boards with the people on the boards scattered all over the state. When any problem came up, the executive officer would say: "my board told me . . . ." He was responsible only to his board. No one person could control that kind of a setup. You couldn't get your teeth into anything in the governmental mishmash. That's why executive reorganization was so popular.<sup>44</sup>

Holmes was amazed at the influence of personalities when the executive reorganization package was presented to the legislature. State Auditor E. V. "Sonny" Omholt and State Lands Commissioner Ted Schwinden were more convincing than the executive reorganization commission.

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<sup>41</sup>February 19, 1980.

<sup>42</sup>June 30, 1980.

<sup>43</sup>Anderson was governor from 1969 to 1973.

<sup>44</sup>June 30, 1980.

The commission found out Omholt had a lot of influence when they tried unsuccessfully to move the insurance duties to the Department of Business Regulation.

And, when they set up a new mine-land reclamation commission, Ted Schwinden wanted it in the Lands Department. The reorganization people wanted it in the Natural Resources Department. Schwinden won.<sup>45</sup>

About executive reorganization, Holmes said:

I never felt it improved state government that much. It changed titles and regrouped. I can't get that excited about it but it probably has more benefits than not.<sup>46</sup>

Holmes thinks the election of five public service commissioners, each from a specific district in the state,<sup>47</sup> is probably better for the consumer. But, he added, few people now even know who is on the Public Service Commission.

There is one thing I dislike. When the three-member PSC was elected statewide, more people knew who they were. Now they don't. George Turman found that out.

Before, it was much more of a political stepping stone. It was used by politicians. It's probable that the five-member commission benefits the consumer.<sup>48</sup>

Holmes thinks the 1972 Constitution was needed to streamline government but believes "it will be years before we know if the new constitution went far enough."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>June 27, 1980.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>The five-member commission went into effect January 1975.

<sup>48</sup>June 27, 1980. Turman, A PSC member, was defeated in the 1978 primary when he ran for the U. S. Congress.

<sup>49</sup>June 27, 1980.

The Governors

Holmes pointed out that often his contact in the governor's office was the top administrative aide because the governor was too busy or gone.

Days would go by and he would not see the governor, sometimes because the governor was out of the state. When aides did not volunteer that information, Holmes had to find a way to determine where the governor was. He discovered the governor had to file a legal document giving power to the lieutenant governor to be acting governor. That document was public record in the secretary of state's office where Holmes went to check if he suspected the governor had left the state.

When Holmes started working for the Associated Press, Will Aiken,<sup>50</sup> a top aide to governors for forty years, was serving as Gov. Sam Ford's executive secretary. From there, Holmes ticked off a long list of gubernatorial aides: John W. Hanley and Walter Coombs for Governor Ford; W. G. "Bud" Blanchette for Gov. John Bonner; Fred Martin, Wesley Castles, and Darrell Coover for Gov. J. Hugo Aronson; Dennis Gordon for Gov. Donald Nutter; Jack Hallowell, Ed Nelson, and Jim Patton for Gov. Tim Babcock; Ron Richards for governors Forrest Anderson and Tom Judge, and Keith Colbo and Ray Dore for Governor Judge.

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<sup>50</sup> Aiken was appointed February 1, 1906, by Gov. Joseph K. Toole and served both Democratic and Republican governors.

Holmes said Richards, Castles, and Coover were the most influential and had the greatest political "savvy" except for Aiken, whom he called an "institution."<sup>51</sup>

Holmes said Blanchette had the "toughest problem and roughest experience"<sup>52</sup> when he had to field questions about Bonner getting drunk and landing in a New Orleans jail.

We [the AP] were afraid to print anything until it was confirmed with the governor's office here. New Orleans AP office called and asked us to check. Everyone was doublechecking. It was a touchy thing and Blanchette was getting questions from all over the country.<sup>53</sup>

Bonner lost the 1952 gubernatorial race to Aronson soon after the New Orleans incident when pictures of him standing behind bars made the national wires. After the election, Bonner was at a Board of Education meeting Holmes was covering.

He walked over to me, sat down and put his arm around me, and asked: "What happened, J. D.?" I told him: "New Orleans." He already knew that.<sup>54</sup>

Holmes related the other story he likes to tell about Bonner to Tom Kotynski in 1978:

Holmes has a good Bonner story which involves another of his favorite politicians, former congressman Orvin Fjare of Big Timber. It was during the

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<sup>51</sup> June 27, 1980.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

1960 U.S. Senate campaign, and Bonner was running for the nomination as a Democrat and Fjare was running as a Republican. Lee Metcalf was the eventual winner over Bonner in the primary and Fjare in the general election. Bonner got to talking to Holmes at a [Helena] bar one night about how much he liked Fjare despite his being a Republican and a potential opponent, and said he wanted to donate to Fjare's campaign because he wanted to see good young people stay in politics. He began to write a \$50 check on the condition that it was given to Fjare without telling him who it came from. Holmes reminded him that the check was easily traceable. So Bonner cashed the check and handed Holmes the money and told him to give it to Fjare, which he later did. "Only in Montana would you find something like this happening," Holmes said.<sup>55</sup>

Holmes said that not until the Montana magazine article did he tell anyone about giving the money to Fjare. Holmes had first met the future congressman in Big Timber when Fjare was a grocery clerk and would come next door to the Sweet Grass News for a smoke. He said Bonner asked him not to write about the donation but thinks he may have included it in "Montanalyzing" without mentioning names.

Holmes said that if he had a favorite among the governors it was J. Hugo Aronson, whom he described as:

. . . warm, friendly, and the kind of guy who always make you feel important. When he liked you, he really liked you. No one thought he was going to win the election. He turned out to be a helluva great guy. He was proud of his rags-to-riches life. He never hid anything from the press. His eight years as governor were very friendly.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Thomas Kotynski, "J. D. Holmes Reviews 30 Years of Legislators, Governors, Judges and Budgets," Montana, Magazine of the Northern Rockies, January-February, 1979, p. 30.

<sup>56</sup>June 27, 1980.

Near the end of his tenure, Aronson demanded that Holmes be included in his cabinet photo, making Holmes probably the lone reporter to be part of such an official photograph.

Like all but Bonner and Ford, Donald Nutter served in the legislature first, so Holmes knew him before he was a gubernatorial candidate. Nutter was a close friend and invited Holmes to his "war councils," which Holmes described as excellent sources for news stories. Nutter offered Holmes jobs both during the 1960 campaign and in his administration.

Holmes refused jobs from all politicians because "they were in and out of office while I stayed on in my job. I guess I'm just not a gambler."<sup>57</sup>

To illustrate how governors come and go, he said in the 1960s he watched Gov. Sam Ford daily walk by the Associated Press office to and from his law office. "He'd walk all alone. Children would be playing. People would walk by him, not even knowing that he had been the governor of Montana twenty years earlier. It was sad."<sup>58</sup>

Holmes was and still is a personal friend of Gov. Tim Babcock. In 1980, Babcock visited Holmes to urge him to run as a Republican for the Montana Legislature. Holmes declined because: "I wouldn't mind serving but I don't want

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

to campaign."<sup>59</sup> In addition, after he retired, Holmes donated \$850 to Democrat Ted Schwinden's primary election campaign for governor. He also served as master of ceremonies for an art auction fundraiser for Schwinden and his running mate George Turman, Bert Holmes' stepnephew-in-law.

Holmes remembers Gov. Forrest Anderson as a down-to-earth man who swore terribly. "But, we cleaned up his quotes."<sup>60</sup> Holmes said Anderson was known as the "old fox" because: "He's a pretty sharp guy. He has a native shrewdness about legal and gubernatorial matters."<sup>61</sup> Anderson offered Holmes an appointment to the Board of Health, but Holmes turned it down because covering the board was part of his job.

Holmes said Tom and Carol Judge were guests at his home and that his support of Schwinden in 1980 came about because:

I just felt two terms as governor is enough for anybody. Judge had a natural loss of interest in the job in the last few years. You don't approach the job with the same vigor as when you first start.<sup>62</sup>

Holmes noted that he always maintained when he was an AP reporter that he was "not-partisan, neutral, and

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.



independent" and that his public support of Schwinden-Turman is his first endorsement of any candidate.

## CHAPTER VIII

Holmes covered every statewide election from 1948 to 1978 and interviewed national politicians, including Pres. John F. Kennedy and Sen. Mike Mansfield. He also covered major events and disasters in the state, including the death of Gov. Donald Nutter, the Mann Gulch Fire, and the 1959 Madison Canyon Earthquake.

The 1964 gubernatorial election produced an embarrassing moment for the Montana Associated Press. That year, the Associated Press erroneously declared Roland Renne the winner over incumbent Gov. Tim Babcock.

It was the biggest political mistake made while I was with the AP. But, I didn't have anything to do with the decision. The bureau chief along with a veteran political observer who analyzes returns makes the decision.

Those mistakes happen. You have to recognize that. But, it's also what gives you gray hairs.

We corrected it but I remember the Montana Standard carried Renne elected governor in its first edition.<sup>1</sup>

Holmes said his best played pre-election story also was in 1964. The story, given a 72-point headline in the Billings Gazette:

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with J. D. Holmes, Helena, Montana, June 30, 1980. Subsequent footnotes for interviews with Holmes give the date only.

By J. D. Holmes  
Associated Press Capitol Writer

HELENA--It may shock many Montana voters Tuesday to find, on looking over ballots, that more than half of their partisan primary decisions are already made.

Only once before in the past two decades have Montanans had more party nominations settled before the primary than now. . . .<sup>2</sup>

His Black Book with its statistics and background material also was helpful for election stories. "Elections were one of my long suits. I had good statistics and because of them developed a good reputation as an expert on elections."<sup>3</sup>

Holmes did not look forward to election nights:

It was a big pain of a night. The mechanics of it made it tedious. You were always tired of waiting by the time the returns started to come in. No bureau chief ever looked forward to election night either.

Beyond that, it was always interesting to see what the results would be. I wrote the leads on at least one of the top races and then the next day the legislative roundup. I had all my background information [in the Black Book] and really enjoyed the legislative story through the years.<sup>4</sup>

Holmes described the 1950 general election night as the most hectic in the Helena Associated Press office. That day a Western Airlines plane crashed near Butte, killing twenty-two persons.

It was a snowy November day. Kamps called and told me to go to the airport and charter a plane to go to Butte. I wasn't crazy about it. As it

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<sup>2</sup>Billings (Mont.) Gazette, May 31, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>June 19, 1980.

<sup>4</sup>June 30, 1980.

turned out, I was lucky. No pilot would take off so I didn't have to go. We had a stringer in Butte cover it for us. But, it was a terrible night in the bureau. Along with the election stuff, we needed pictures, causes, and names from the crash. The crash wasn't one of those stories you could just write once and be done with it.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1960 campaign, Holmes got an exclusive interview with John F. Kennedy, who was in Helena to court votes for the National Democratic Convention. Holmes found about Kennedy's surprise arrival while visiting with Democrats in the Placer Hotel, and went to the airport.

His [JFK's] plane, the "Caroline," landed at about 11:00 with only a skinny handful--Leif Erickson, Hugh Lemire, Paul Cannon, Arnold Olsen, and Marie Merrill, who was serving as secretary to the JFK-for-President organization in Helena, and Associated Press reporter J. D. Holmes--there to meet him. An aide came off first. Holmes asked where Kennedy was. The aide said he'd been sleeping, and was just getting dressed. After a few minutes, Senator Kennedy, who'd left Hyannis Port that morning, and given two speeches in Iowa on the way, came off the plane. He talked to Holmes as they walked toward the cars. . . .<sup>6</sup>

The Associated Press rented a room near Kennedy's in the Placer for its national correspondent and photographer assigned to Kennedy. Holmes made it his headquarters as he followed Kennedy for two days. Holmes quickly came to like Kennedy:

Kennedy's personality was everything you've read about. When you were in his presence, you felt his

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<sup>5</sup>June 30, 1980.

<sup>6</sup>Edmund Christopherson, Westward I Go Free: The Story of J.F.K. in Montana (Missoula, Mont.: Earthquake Press, 1964), p. 27.

magnetism. [In contrast] Ted is loud. He has no magnetism. He just doesn't have it.<sup>7</sup>

At a Democratic State Convention in Butte, Mike Mansfield told Holmes how he came to deliver the Kennedy eulogy in the Capitol rotunda:

It was late in the evening and the crowd had thinned out in the Finlen [Hotel]. I got on the elevator to go up to my room and Mansfield got on. We were the only two in the elevator. I asked him if he would like a nightcap. (I usually took a portable bar with me when I traveled.) Mansfield sat on the edge of the bed in my room and as we visited, told me how Jackie Kennedy had called him several times about the eulogy, first asking him to do it and then suggesting what he should say.<sup>8</sup>

Holmes had become well acquainted with Mansfield who "very religiously stopped at the AP to visit whenever he was in Helena."<sup>9</sup>

Holmes said the hardest story for him to cover was the death of Gov. Donald Nutter, January 25, 1962. A friend, Nutter had played poker at Holmes' the Saturday night before the plane crash. Killed in the crash were Nutter, his executive secretary Dennis Gordon, State Commissioner of Agriculture Ed Wren, and three crew members.

Holmes recalled the events the day of the crash:

That morning, I rode up in the elevator with Gordon. He was telling me how he'd been up most of the night and had just driven in from Missoula.

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<sup>7</sup>June 19, 1980.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

Later, I was in the governor's office when Nutter asked Gordon to go along. Gordon said, "I'm so tired." Nutter told him, "You can sleep on the plane." And sleep he did. He never woke up.

I had the last interview with Nutter. It was still in my notebook when he died.<sup>10</sup>

Holmes recorded three pages of notes about the final interview with Nutter. The interview pertained to a conversation Nutter had with United States Secretary of Interior Morris Udall about the elk "firing line" north of Yellowstone Park and grazing and agricultural leases on federal lands.

Holmes said the Nutter story was like many others-- everyone in the bureau handled it, rewriting and updating leads as new information came in.

He ticked off a long list of other major stories he helped cover, including the 1970 cannibal slaying of James Schlosser, the 1957 Deer Lodge Prison riot, and the 1949 Mann Gulch Fire in which thirteen smokejumpers were killed.

Holmes covered the Mann Gulch Fire from Forest Service Headquarters in downtown Helena, calling in leads. Later when Richard Widmark came to Montana to make the movie "Red Skies Over Montana" about the fire, Holmes and his wife went to Missoula to watch the filming.

When we went over to Missoula, I wasn't even sure Widmark would still know me. We had been on the debate team together and I had been in a couple plays with him during college. I'd also doubledated

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

with him and his wife, Jean Hazelwood, who are still married--that's unusual for Hollywood.<sup>11</sup>

Widmark did recognize him and the Holmeses spent the evening with Widmark, Richard Boone, and Jeff Hunter drinking in a bar.

In the 1950s and early 1960s Holmes wrote many of the "Top Ten Stories of the Year," an annual year-end story. He particularly likes the 1957 roundup lead:

From behind the gray sandstone walls of the state prison at Deer Lodge came Montana's two biggest news stories of 1957.

An ordinary green pea is said to have touched off the institution's first major uprising. . . .

It was the 23-year-old [Willard Arthur] Brown who, nearly three months after the riot collapsed, took off on a wild flight<sup>12</sup> that developed into the year's No. 2 story. . . .<sup>12</sup>

Holmes was the night editor when the major story of 1959--the Madison Canyon Earthquake--began at 11:37 p.m. August 17, 1959.

We were used to "aftershocks," small tremors from quakes years earlier in Helena, but this just kept going. The typewriters were actually shifting. We began wondering if we should leave. Then, all of a sudden the phones began to ring. The two operators had to answer phones too. They weren't used to this so I told them to just get the name of the town, the stringer's name, and ask about damage. The usual response they got was, "We're feeling a tremor here but there's no damage." I had a blockbuster of a story, listing all the towns reporting tremors but no damage.

Then, someone called in from Bozeman and said it was bad in the Madison Canyon. I realized we had not

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<sup>11</sup>June 29, 1980.

<sup>12</sup>Helena (Mont.) Independent Record, December 26, 1957, p. 1.

heard from the Ennis and Virginia City area. That's when I called Maddox. He was at Canyon Ferry at his cabin with no phone. His wife Marilyn drove out and got him.<sup>13</sup>

Holmes worked through the night and the next day, going home twenty-four hours after he had gone on shift the day before. He worked thirty-six hours overtime that week and on his own time accompanied Gov. J. Hugo Aronson to Madison Canyon. Holmes said it was awesome to fly over. His favorite news story about the earthquake came from the trip with Aronson. In his "earthquake" file envelope is the yellowed original story dated August 29, 1959. The lead:

The tremendous earth and rock slide that choked off one of the world's best trout fishing streams can be awe-inspiring, leaving you at a loss for words. Or it can be a rather disappointing spectacle.

The story described the reaction of a women who saw the quake damage from four miles away, and related details of the destruction and efforts to cut a channel for the river.

Also in 1959, the sale of the Anaconda Company-owned daily newspapers to Lee Enterprises was a major news event in the state. Holmes talked about the difference the sale made.

"I get upset when I read, as I often do, about dramatic improvements in Montana's newspapers once Lee Enterprises bought them from the Anaconda Company in 1959," said Holmes. "The impression people have who haven't been here for a while is that the company papers were no good at all and that Montanans were living in a news vacuum," he said.

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<sup>13</sup> June 30, 1980.



Holmes says the term "captive press" annoys him.

"I worked with newspapers and on newspapers during that period of time," Holmes said. "And Montana had a good press then when balanced against the times and other papers. Yes, there were probably sins of omission, but I think every paper had their sins of omission." To prove his point, Holmes pulls out a standard journalism textbook of the era, dated 1942, entitled "Newspaper Editing, Makeup and Headlines" which pictures the then company-owned Billings Gazette as an example of good newspaper makeup, next to a picture of the New York Herald Tribune. "Montana wasn't sitting in a vacuum," he said, "or the Gazette wouldn't have been used by a nationally distributed textbook as an example of good newspapering."

Holmes, who intimately knew many of the company's editors and reporters, said that if the editors of his period would have stood up for their news judgment they probably would have prevailed. The practice was for editors to check their Montana Standard published in Butte, every day to see how they were supposed to play stories.

The company's interest in their newspapers' editorial content waned, Holmes believes, after two Montanans who had risen to top leadership at Anaconda retired: Cornelius Kelley and Dan Kelly. Kelley, who became chairman of the board and president, grew up in Butte. Kelly was a former Montana attorney general who became Anaconda's vice president of western operations. They had a keen interest in Montana affairs and the newspapers even after they left Montana for corporate headquarters in New York. When they left in the '40s, top level interest in Montana began to diminish, Holmes said, "And while there might have been orders coming out on what should go into the newspapers, they weren't top level orders. I've talked to many people over the years, and I'm convinced that editors went blindly along with the old practices. If any had had the courage or spunk to speak up, they (top level management) would have done nothing," he said. He guessed that lower echelon company officials sometimes called the shots and top brass knew nothing about it. He doesn't think much got omitted, anyway, perhaps a death in a mine. "But if that occurred today it would still get buried in the papers because it's not that significant a news event," he said.

He can recall, however, that there were some "repercussions" when AP referred to the "copper collar" during the 1947 Legislature. And once AP hit a sore spot when it referred to "miners' shacks" in Butte, and the company flagship, the Montana Standard, protested.

Holmes said an indication of Anaconda's good will toward Montana in relation to their [sic] newspapers was expressed by C. J. Parkinson, general counsel for the company, who, talking about the sale of the papers said, "We want to sell to someone who will give Montana a good press. Someone who knows how to run newspapers for cities our size."

Holmes said, "I wouldn't subscribe to the word 'dramatic' to describe the changes in newspapers in Montana since Anaconda sold to Lee Newspapers. But there has been significant improvement due to new blood, new management, and technological improvements." He believes that Montana journalism has moved with the times, getting into investigative reporting and doing more news analysis. The creation of the Tribune Capitol Bureau and Lee Newspapers State Bureau has resulted in more in-depth coverage of state government, he says, although he thinks the company press could have set up such a state bureau if its editors had pushed for it.<sup>14</sup>

In 1969 Holmes went on strike along with the other writers and editors in the bureau. They picketed the back door of Helena's Independent Record and conducted their strategy meetings in Holmes' recreation room.

#### Events Honoring Holmes

Holmes was honored by the Last Chance Press Club at a cocktail party October 26, 1973, in recognition of his twenty-five years with the Associated Press. It was attended by 100 persons, including former governor Tim Babcock and three of the five Montana Supreme Court justices. Several others, including Gov. Tom Judge and Western District Congressman Dick Shoup, sent their regards. Judge's letter:

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<sup>14</sup>Thomas Kotynski, "J. D. Holmes Reviews 30 Years of Legislatures, Governors, Judges and Budgets," Montana Magazine of the Northern Rockies, January-February 1979, pp. 31-32.

I regret not being able to join with your many friends and associates in honoring you for 25 years of highly professional service to the Associated Press and the people of Montana. Your knowledge of state government and political affairs and your professional integrity have provided the people of this state with an accurate and unbiased understanding of public issues. And, this is a great personal achievement and public contribution.

Best wishes to you. . . .<sup>15</sup>

Shoup's letter:

With a few notable exceptions, we politicians come and go, but J. D. goes on forever.

Seems like as long as I can remember, I've been reading your byline. I'm surprised to discover it has only been a quarter of a century.<sup>16</sup>

I wish you many more years. . . .

Holmes worked five more years before retiring in October 1978. Seventy persons attended his retirement dinner at the Colonial October 14. The Last Chance Press Club sponsored a social hour October 20 when it presented him with a Black Book containing notes of congratulations from press club members and dignitaries.

The Associated Press story announcing his retirement:

HELENA (AP) J.D. Holmes, political writer for the Associated Press in Montana for more than a quarter-century, is retiring Oct. 7 after 42 years as editor and newsman.

Holmes, who turns 64 in January, joined the AP in Helena Oct. 2, 1948, after several years as managing editor of the Lewistown Daily News.

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<sup>15</sup>Thomas Judge (Governor, State of Montana, 1973-80) letter to J. D. Holmes, October 26, 1973, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

<sup>16</sup>Dick Shoup (Montana Western District Congressman, 1970-1974) letter to J. D. Holmes, October 24, 1973, from Holmes library, Helena, Montana.

Before that, he owned or operated three weekly newspapers--the Sweet Grass News at Big Timber, the Yellowstonian at West Yellowstone and the Fergus County Argus at Lewistown. He previously worked on newspapers in Sheridan, Wyo., and Wichita, Kan.

Holmes, whose initials stand for Joseph Defrees, spent three World War II years as an airways radio operator in the Air Force. He was graduated from Lake Forest College in Illinois in 1936.

Major stories he helped cover from the Montana Statehouse included an airliner crash on a general election day, the Madison Canyon earthquake that buried 28 tourists, the death of Gov. Donald G. Nutter in a plane crash and a forest fire that killed 13 smokejumpers.

He and his wife Bert have raised three children, all married.

He said he plans to remain in Helena.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Missoula (Mont.) Missoulian, August 20, 1978,  
p. 2.

## AFTERWARD

From youth, Holmes was competitive and possessed the ability to meet and cultivate people who could help him. In the thirty years he worked for the Associated Press, he was an objective reporter and developed tools for accurately and quickly backgrounding news stories.

Holmes' ability to obtain exclusive stories came from his longevity on the job, his cultivation of sources, and his reporting techniques. United Press International, Great Falls Tribune Capital Bureau, and Lee State Bureau reporters came and went; Holmes stayed. He was a fixture in the Montana Capitol for more than twenty-five years and news sources gave him tips and stories because they knew him well and trusted him to not reveal his sources. Holmes chatted with and gave candy to secretaries and entertained top state officials and lobbyists in his home, practices other reporters frowned on. He constantly listened to conversations in offices and the halls to pick up clues for piecing together news stories.

Any criticism of Holmes that he was not objective has no concrete basis. Like any reporter, he used words with connotative meanings such as "pointed out" cited in

the body of this manuscript. But, Holmes was not a reporter who intentionally biased the stories he wrote, or the reporting he did.

Accuracy was a fetish with Holmes. To insure accuracy, in backgrounding stories, he developed his filing system, black books, and legislative clip book. He could quickly add background information that was accurate and would complete the story to make it understandable to the reader or listener.

Objectivity was so much a part of Holmes' nature that he disliked making any judgments. Only on rare occasions did he in the series of interviews for this paper say anything negative about any individual. That devotion to objective reporting made it impossible for Holmes to write news analysis or investigative stories. The Associated Press did not want its reporters to inject their own opinions in stories, but Holmes also found it difficult to compile news analysis stories linking events together. The daily, short objective stories and his column "Montanalyzing"--which was essentially a series of short news stories--were his style of reporting and writing. He did not like any writing which required him to be subjective.

Holmes genuinely likes people. He does not look for evil in people and as a reporter did not look for the negative. He became friends with the news sources because

he liked them as individuals. He is proud that he knew the governors before they became governors. Numerous times in the interviews for this paper he stated: "I never met a politician or lobbyist I didn't like."

The Associated Press must provide the daily routine coverage of happenings at the Capitol. In Holmes' case, he was satisfied with the routine spot news stories.

Holmes was aggressive in obtaining numerous spot news stories each day but not in doing interpretative or investigative stories. This was a product of his preference of objective reporting, his personality and, in part, the nature of the job as an Associated Press Capitol reporter.

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